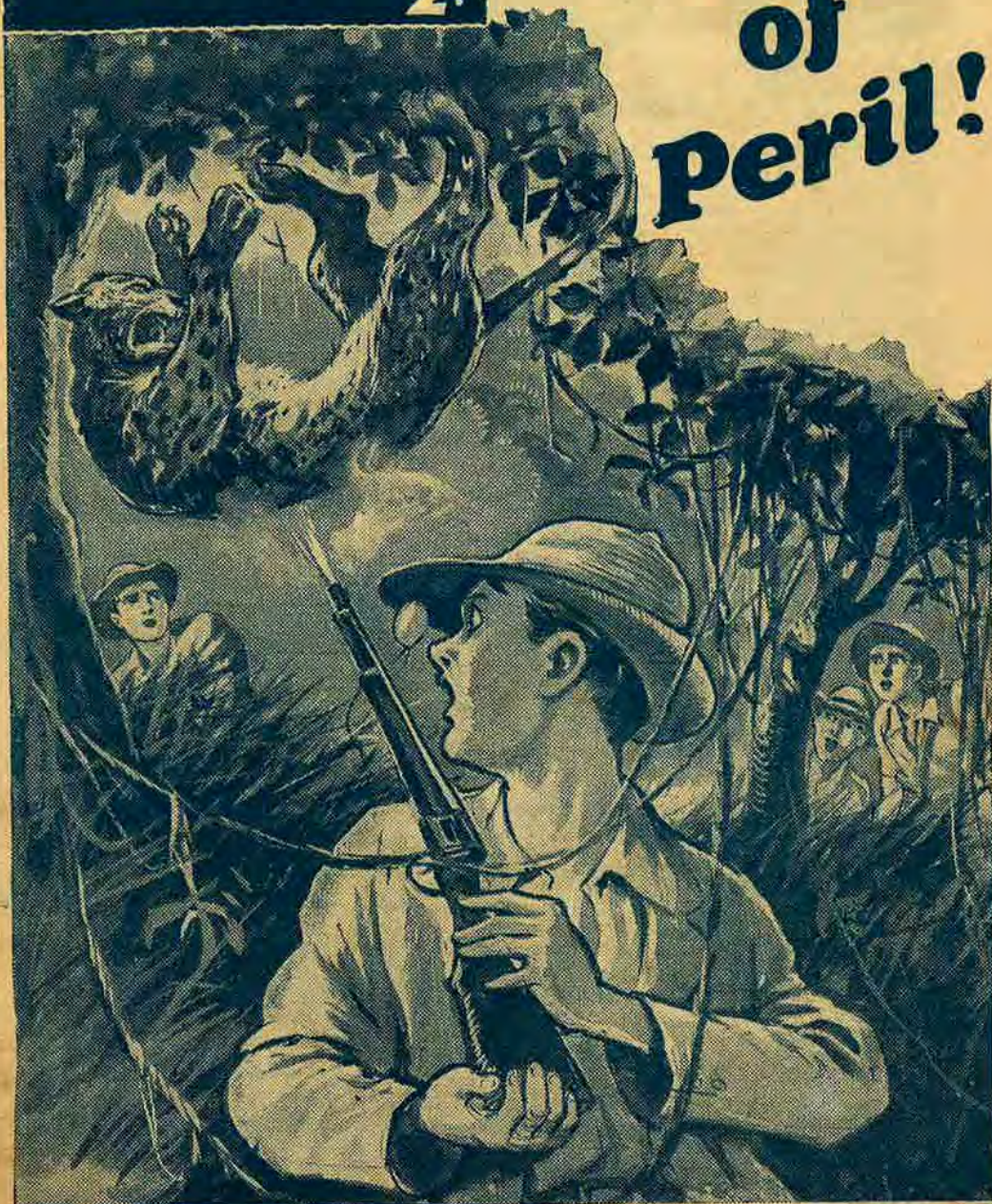


FOLLOW THE ADVENTURES OF TOM MERRY & CO. ON THE—

THE
GEM
2^d

**Trail
of
peril!**





Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Bull himself! But keep your letter **SHORT**, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned.

Kenneth Usher, of West Bromwich, Staffs, writes:

You seem to think you're smart! Why was your page continued in preference to Monty Lowther's or "Detective" Kerr's? Are all the letters on your page genuine? What do you do if a letter stumps you? How high is up? Who invents the funny answers for you—Monty Lowther?

Have any other writers ever written for the GEM except Martin Clifford and Owen Conquest? How long has the GEM been in existence? As long as the GEM keeps up its present standard I shall be **Yours Faithfully**.

ANSWER: *Mr. smart? Who says? My page is having a run for as long as it is popular. Yes, all letters published are perfectly genuine. If you could see the pile before me as I write, you wouldn't doubt it. I only wish the Editor could spare more space every week. It's like having a lot of friends staring you in the face, and being unable to answer any but a few. No letter "stumps" me completely. I always "play" the ball, however much of a "sizzler" it may be. I usually keep my "wicket" intact, too—though I frankly admit I am occasionally "caught out" by a correspondent "fiddling" in the country. Up is where you put the ball just before the fieldman catches it. If you find a funny answer on this page, don't blame Lowther! Various authors have written for the GEM, which has been in existence thirty-two years. As long as there are faithful readers like you we shall continue until we have put up our "century"!*

Jack Leaf, of New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada, writes:

Hallo, Blake, old chap!
What year was the first GEM published?
Who is the youngest pupil at St. Jim's?
Who is the oldest?
What is your favourite sport?

ANSWER: *The GEM first appeared in March, 1907, and it is hard now to imagine a world without a GEM. I don't think the Dark Ages would have seemed half so dark had there been some St. Jim's stories, written perhaps in black letters, but "red-hot" as they are to-day, with the eads showing "yellow" streaks, and basking "blue" when caught out! And Ye Editor writing his little bit with a Pax vobiscum instead of "Hallo, chums!" Don't ask me to translate—as a Latin scholar I'm very good at French!*
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Kildare is the oldest, but I can't tell you the youngest at Ye College of St. James. My favourite sports is wringing answers to your very interesting letters, whether you write in black letter English, or use a typewriter! Pax vobiscum, old man. Well, cheerio, anyway!

Lynx Lynton, of Amoy Street, Singapore, writes:

ANTIPHILOPROGENITIVENESS.

Try to beat this one, Blake! I wonder how Gussy will pronounce it?

ANSWER: *Well, it's a crackerjack of a word, but you don't tell us what it means. Not that it means anything in particular, I dare say. Most long words seem to obscure rather than clarify matters, don't they? I mean, words like "Good," "Rotten," "Funny," "Fearful," and so on convey human emotions much better than saying the joke was a bit antediluvian, for instance. Now somebody ask what antediluvian means—go on! "Penny congratulate Lynx Lynton on his industry, Blake," was Gussy's comment.*

E. M. J., of Crumlin, Monmouthshire, writes:

1. How old is St. Jim's? 2. How is it St. Jim's does not play Rugby? 3. Are there any Welsh juniors in the school? 4. What is Trimble around the waist?

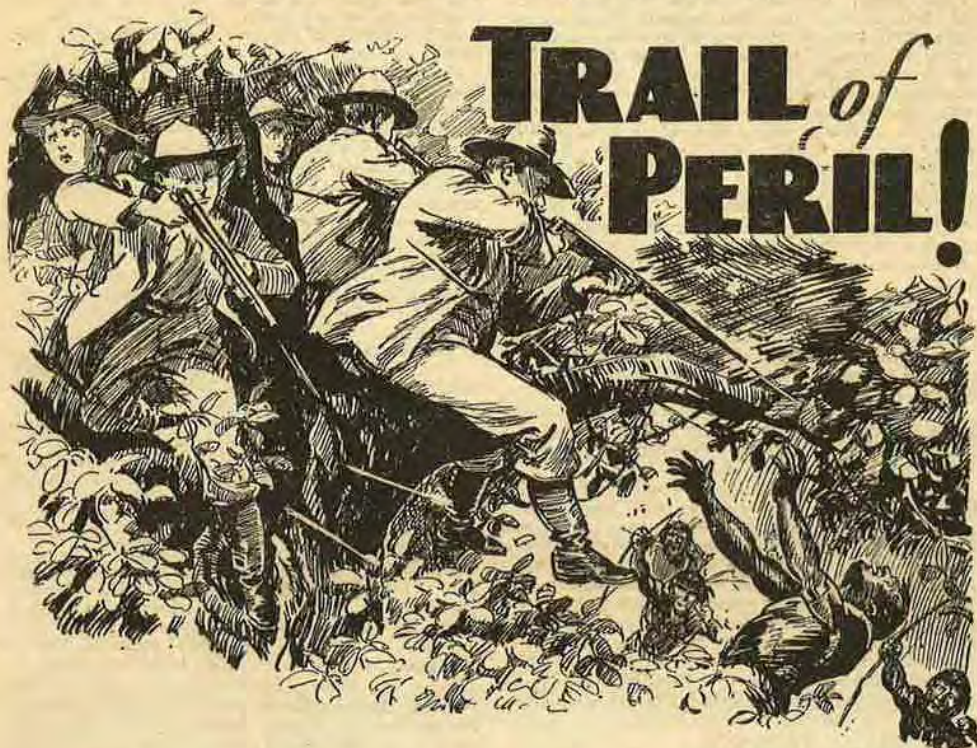
ANSWER: *1. About 385 years older than I am! 2. By just refraining, that's all. Soccer takes our time. 3. Are there? Fatty Wynn asks rather plaintively if you've never heard of him? 4. Fat. Okeydoke?*

Frank Maraday, of Fremantle, W. Australia, writes:

My father having made a pile of money, I have persuaded him to let me come to St. Jim's. I am fifteen, five feet three inches, and handsome, with dark wavy hair. I have a pretty sister, too, so if you'll be a pal of mine I'll introduce you!

ANSWER: *We'll be delighted to see you; but you have to enter for St. Jim's some time in advance, and this is a matter for the governors. We are rather short of really handsome Fourth Formers with dark wavy hair at the moment, but the thing that will matter most is—are you a regular fellow? Some of the "ugliest" "Saints" are the "handsomest"—once you get to know them!*

SAVAGE INDIANS—RUTHLESS BANDITS—WILD BEASTS! TOM MERRY & CO.
HAVE TO FACE THEM ALL AS THEY FOLLOW THE—



STORM ON THE BLACK RIVER!

"**A** NYBODY feel warm?" murmured Tom Merry.

Nobody answered.

Seven St. Jim's juniors were, in fact, too warm and too breathless to waste unnecessary effort in speech.

It was not merely warm; it was not merely hot. It was like an oven—and a particularly hot oven!

Tom Merry & Co., during the weeks they had spent in South America, had found Brazil a hot country; but they had never hitherto found it quite so hot as this. Now it was like the warmest place known—with the lid off!

The long canoe surged slowly up the Rio Preto—the "Black River" of the back-country of Brazil.

Even the four Indian paddlers showed signs of lassitude. They paddled slowly, hardly more than keeping the nose of the canoe steady to the sluggish current. Even O Pepino, the big black man, had a tired look.

Tom Merry sat with a rifle across his knees, watching the wall of green forest along the banks. But it did not seem likely that any enemy would be stirring in that terrible heat.

Manners had his camera on his knee, but it was too hot for taking snaps. Monty Lowther was fanning himself gently with a palm-leaf.

Blake, Herries, and Digby lay half-dozing. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat with his eyeglass between finger and thumb.

In the bow, Gaston Moutarde, the French trader, lay asleep. It was Gaston who watched by night while the schoolboys slept, and he had to make up for it in the daytime.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus broke the silence at last. "It's hot! It's feahfully hot, you fellows! Still, we must expect it to be hot in the torrid zone."

Monty Lowther made an effort. It was fearfully, awfully hot, and there seemed no air to breathe on the Black River that baking afternoon. But the funny man of the St. Jim's Shell could not possibly let slip the chance of perpetrating a pun, good or bad.

"Do you think it 'orrid?" he murmured.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, not even realising that Monty was making a pun. "If I remember my geogwaphy cowrectly, Bwazil is in the towwid zone, Lowthah. It certainly feels towwid!"

"Blow that 'orrid zone!" said Monty.

**Starring the St. Jim's
Chums in Big-Thrill
Adventure in Brazil**

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

"Bai Jove! I wish somethin' would blow!" said Arthur Augustus, still happily unconscious of the pun. "There does not seem to be a breath of air. Even old Cucumbah is feelin' the heat."

O Pepino, whom Gussy called by the English translation of his name, Cucumber, was dashing away rivers of perspiration with a big black hand. He grinned, with a flash of dazzling teeth, as his name was spoken.

"Quenote, senhor!" he murmured.

"Bai Jove! I wondah what he means by kenty?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Hot," said Tom. Tom Merry had picked up a good deal of Portuguese.

O Pepino made a gesture towards the brassy sky.

"A tempestade!" he said.

"Know what that means, Tom Mewwy?"

"Storm," answered Tom.

"Bai Jove! I should wathah like a storm for a change fwom this feashful heat. But it looks as calm as anythin' to me."

"Bet you Cucumber knows, though!" said Blake, sitting up and taking notice. "One of those blessed tropical storms coming on, perhaps. Well, a spot of rain won't hurt us."

"Wathah not! I should be vewy glad to see some wain instead of this beasty sunshine!" sighed Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! What wouldn't I give for a Novembah fog now!"

The thickest, blackest November fog that ever wrapped London in gloom would have been welcome to the St. Jim's party in place of the intense glare of sunshine that made their eyeballs ache.

But they could not hope for such a blessing on the sun-scorched desert in the interior of Brazil.

"Hallo, what's that?" asked Herries, as a low rumble came echoing over the forest.

"O trovao," said Cucumber.

"Thunder," said Tom Merry.

"You see, old Cucumbah knows," said Arthur Augustus. "It was vewy luckay for us, as well as for him, that we got him away fwom that alligator two or three weeks ago. He has been vewy useful on this twip. I dare say he's known all the time that a storm was comin' on. Bai Jove! I shall be glad when it comes!"

"Looks as if it's coming now," said Digby.

"And sounds like it, too!" said Tom.

The rumble of thunder over the forest died away into a breathless silence, in which it seemed that a pin might have been heard to fall. But that silence was broken by a clap of thunder with a roar like artillery, and then came peal on peal, echoing and re-echoing, as if the skies were cracking.

So terrific was the sudden din that the juniors clapped their hands to their ears.

There was a movement in the bows of the canoe. Startled out of sleep by that ear-cracking roar, Gaston Montarde leaped to his feet.

"Mon Dieu!" gasped the French trader.

He stared up at the sky, of which the brassy glare was dimming in a dark veil. Then he shouted in Portuguese to the paddlers.

The four Indians immediately steered for the bank, under the overhanging branches of the forest giants. At the rapping voice of their master, they woke to instant activity.

Tom Merry & Co. all looked at Gaston. They could read alarm in his startled face.

But he did not heed the juniors. He rapped quick orders to the Indian crew, and the canoe

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was tied up, fore and aft, to jutting boughs of a ceiba-tree on the bank.

Roll on roll of thunder pealed through the darkening sky.

Five minutes ago the glare of the sunshine had been like fire, and not a sound had broken the heavy silence. Now a dim twilight reigned over the Rio Preto and its forest-clad banks, and the air throbbed with uproar. It was a sudden and startling change to the St. Jim's juniors—far from accustomed, like Gaston, to the freaks of tropical weather.

"Allons!" snapped Monsieur Montarde, in an interval of the rolling thunder. "I sleep ven zis storm he come. I have ze eye shut, and it needs to keep him verree open. But now we tie up, and perhaps ze canoe he is safe. Nous verrons."

"Is it goin' to wain, sir?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Gaston stared at him.

"Vous verrez—you will see—zere vill be too much rain," he answered. "Mon Dieu! Zat you hold on to ze canoe."

It came suddenly—a spatter of heavy drops, followed by what seemed like a sheet of water from the opening heavens. Rain crashed rather than fell on the river. With the flooding rain came an almost continuous roll of thunder.

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "We're getting some wain—no mistake about that!"

No ear could hear him in the roar.

Tom Merry & Co., for the first minute or two, had a feeling of relief. The dim twilight after the glare of the sun, the flooding rain soaking them to the skin after the burning heat, were welcome. But they very soon realised that it was possible to have too much of a good thing.

Over the tied-up canoe was a massy roof of foliage. But the rain came through rather in lumps than in drops. It soaked the St. Jim's crew; it trickled and washed about the canoe. Out on the open river it seemed to be falling in masses, and under their eyes the river was rising and rushing. The sluggish current had turned to a torrent, roaring by and rocking the canoe wildly, and they understood now why Gaston had been alarmed. Had not the canoe been safely tied, it would have been tossed away like a cork on that rushing torrent.

Secured as it was by a rope fore and aft, the long canoe rocked and dipped and plunged, and the juniors held on to save themselves from pitching out. Up in the hills the rain was flooding the Preto with thousands and thousands of tons of water, and the rising river spread over the banks, flooding the forest and lifting the canoe higher towards the branches overhead.

Gaston had only awakened in time. A few minutes more, and the canoe would have been whirling away on the flood, crashing among the spinning driftwood to almost certain destruction. Now the juniors had only to wait, safe at their anchorage, for the wild "tempestade" to blow itself out.

IN DIREST PERIL!

"OH!" gasped Tom Merry suddenly.

He was half-sitting, half-lying in the canoe, holding on to the side, and looking up at the thick branches of the ceiba overhead.

Mingled with the rolling of thunder there was a deep roar from the forest of lashing branches and crashing trunks. With the rain came the wind, and up-rooted trees crashed right and left. Only a dozen yards from the canoe a big tree

crashed down the bank and was whirled away by the torrent, barely missing the canoe as it shot by. Tom's eyes were fixed rather anxiously on the tree to which the canoe was tied.

If that tree went the canoe would go, and it would be a sudden end to the search for Gussy's brother, Lord Conway, in the wilds of Brazil.

But Gaston, quickly as he had acted, had chosen his anchorage with an experienced eye. The ceiba-tree to which he had tied on was a massive giant, with a trunk twelve feet or more in thickness, capable of standing against the fiercest blasts of a tropical storm.

But Tom, as he looked up into the tossing, lashing branches, the foliage driven by wind and rain, suddenly found that he was staring at a face, not ten feet from him in the branches of the ceiba-tree.

He gave a gasp as he saw it—the dark, evil face of Joao Rabeira, the Brazilian bandit.

"Look out!" shouted Tom.

But the loudest shout was unheard in the roar of the storm.

The St. Jim's juniors knew that Rabeira was tracking them up the Black River; but it was days since they had seen or heard anything of the bandit, and they had wondered whether perhaps Joao had gone on ahead of them, to rejoin his "banda" in the heart of the wilderness, and wait for them there. Certainly, in the wild uproar of the storm on the Rio Preto, they had not given him a thought.

But it was the evil face of Rabeira that was peering from the branches of the ceiba down into the canoe.

Only at the risk of his life could the brave have climbed the tree, clinging like a monkey to the swaying, tossing branches. But there he was, his jetty eyes glinting down at the St. Jim's crew—of whom only one had spotted him.

Tom Merry groped for his rifle, to fire up into the ceiba. He expected fire from the bandit above. But shooting would have been utterly wild, short as the range was, with the branches tossing in the wind, and the canoe rocking and swinging to the torrent. That was not the thought in the evil mind of the bandit. It was not a rifle—it was a keen-edged machete that was gripped in his swarthy hand.

Tom Merry fired into the tree. Even the shot was unheard in the din of the storm, but his action was seen. All eyes turned upwards. The bullet missed by yards.

Rabeira, leaning down, holding on with his legs, swept the sword-like axe through the air. The machete, used for hacking a way through tropical growths in the tangled forest, was heavy and sharp. The slash landed on the rope at the bow of the canoe, severing it with a single cut.

That act was seen by the whole crew, but they had no power to intervene. Before even another shot could be fired, the rope was cut and the bow of the canoe tore round in the torrent.

The bandit in the ceiba disappeared from sight as it went.

Spinning round in the current, the canoe rocked and dipped and shipped heavy water. Gaston roared to the juniors to hold on. They did not hear him, but they held on for their lives.

For a terrible moment the canoe was broad-side on to the torrent, and it seemed that it must be swamped.

It was half-full of water when it ran to the

end of the aft rope and hung against the stream, its stern now turned up the river.

Whether a single rope would hold it against the rush of the flood was doubtful. But for the moment at least it held.

Sitting or kneeling in water, in the half-flooded craft, the juniors held on. Gaston Moutarde, on his knees, had his rifle aimed upward, watching for a chance. He could guess that the bandit in the tree would make an attempt on the second rope to send the canoe adrift.

"Oh! Look!" panted Blake.

There was a sudden gleam of steel in the darkness of the foliage. Rabeira had clambered to the branch to which the second rope was tied.

The report of Gaston's rifle was drowned by the thunder. The bullet tore through rain-dripping foliage, but good shot as the French trader was, he had no chance with the canoe rocking and dipping under him.

Whether the shot went close or not, it did not reach the bandit, and the next moment the machete struck and the second rope parted.

"Zat you hold!" shrieked Gaston.

The canoe, released, shot away like an arrow. It swept down the roaring, flooded river at a breathless speed.

In a few seconds the big ceiba-tree and the bandit in its branches were left far behind.

Long distances, gained by hard and patient paddling against the current, were covered by the canoe as it swept down the river like an arrow in its flight.

The juniors could only hold on. Gaston seized a paddle; and O Pepino seized another. The Indian crew, dazed by the terrible peril, had dropped them, but the French trader and the big black man laboured to steady the canoe and keep its nose to the current.

Driftwood, floating logs, and uprooted trees dashed and spun round the canoe as it careered onward, continually crashing against its sides. At every crash the crew expected the quivering craft to sink under them. In the wind and the rain and the rolling thunder, they swept down the Preto at a dizzy speed.

Tom Merry suddenly saw Gaston grit his teeth. He stared ahead through the blinding rain.

Right across the river ahead, barring the Preto almost from side to side, a gigantic ceiba-tree had crashed.

Some of the vast roots still held it to the bank. It lay like a dam across the Preto, tossing wildly in the water that foamed and boiled and roared over it.

It was impossible to avoid the obstruction. Tom Merry knew that the canoe was doomed. No power could have stopped it—and there was no space to pass! The crash was coming, and it was only a matter of seconds. Joao Rabeira had succeeded at last. Tom Merry & Co. would never find the man who was lost in the wilderness, and Joao was left free to deal with his rival for the treasure of Potomayo. So it seemed to Tom Merry as the canoe and its crew rushed on to destruction.

A moment more, and all the crew saw the danger. Gaston shrieked to them, but they could hear no word. O Pepino moved close to the side of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was at least one of the party who would be saved if the black man could save him.

But even at that fearful moment the French trader was cool as ice. He contrived to steer

the canoe to strike the fallen tree in its branches, in the vast mass of foliage that dipped and rolled in the water, instead of on the massive trunk, where the crash would have crumpled it up like an egg-shell.

They could not hear what he yelled to them, but they could guess what he meant—to jump and catch hold when the canoe crashed.

There was a chance of life for the fellows who were cool and steady, and kept their wits about them. And the St. Jim's fellows were not fellows to lose their heads, even as they rushed and whirled in the very valley of the shadow of death.

It was useless to speak, but they exchanged looks. All were ready—still holding on to the canoe till the moment came to jump.

The canoe rushed on to inevitable disaster.

Swept on by the wild flood, it crashed into the mass of thick branches and was instantly buried in a wilderness of tossing boughs, lashing leaves, and mad, surging waters. And in the midst of that wild pandemonium, Tom Merry & Co. struggled and fought for their lives.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH!

TOM MERRY grasped and caught hold. A branch struck him across the chest and he instinctively grasped it as it hurled him over. With both hands gripping, he swung half in air and half in water, and felt the canoe sinking and slipping away under his feet.

The roar of the wild waters seemed to drown even the deep roll of thunder crashing over the forest. Yet through that deafening roar it seemed to Tom that he heard a cry—and he saw a hand that clutched from the waters and missed—and was swept away. But as it went he released one hand and grasped, and he hardly knew how he dragged Monty Lowther on the branch.

But Lowther was beside him there, half-choked, blinded by dashing water, holding to the giant branch of the ceiba that stuck high over the Preto. And a moment later Tom glimpsed Manners—wedged in a fork of the branches where the crash had flung him and jammed him tight.

The three Shell fellows of St. Jim's hung there over the roaring water that splashed and sprayed and foamed about them.

Manners could not move for the moment; Lowther could only clutch on, with spinning brain. But Tom was able to look about him—to help the rest of the crew, if possible.

The canoe was gone, deep under the wild waters—gone for ever, with most of what it carried. Tom gave no thought to that. He stared and peered around him, through foaming flood and dashing rain and tossing foliage, and saw Gaston Moutarde, with Digby in his grasp, clambering in the branches. Dig seemed only half-conscious.

"Here!" shouted Tom. "Give him to me!"

Gaston could not hear him, but he saw him and dragged Digby on the mighty branch where the Shell fellows clung. Tom Merry grasped him and held him, to leave the Frenchman free.

Monsieur Moutarde plunged down through dripping foliage out of his sight. Tom Merry held Dig on the branch; but as he held him from being torn away by the wild waters he stared round anxiously for the others. He could see nothing of Blake or Herries or D'Arcy—and

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he dared not let go of Dig, whose feeble grasp hardly held on to the tree.

Of O Pepino and the Indian paddlers he could see nothing, either; but they had more chance than the schoolboys of saving themselves. The Indians were at home in the water, like fishes, and the black giant had the strength of two ordinary men. But Blake, Herries and D'Arcy would—

A crash of water parted the foliage near him and he saw Blake and Herries tangled lower down in the submerged branches, holding on with their heads barely above water, and Gaston Moutarde scrambling to their aid.

With beating heart he watched the French trader grasp Herries and drag him up, and then Blake. Both of them came clear of the water and then they clambered by their own efforts.

While six juniors held on in the branches Gaston Moutarde clambered away in search of D'Arcy. Forty or fifty persons might have been hidden from sight in that mountain of foliage that rose from the waters of the Preto.

"Gussy!" panted Blake, as he joined Tom Merry.

The rolling of the thunder was dying down. Tom shook his head. He had seen nothing of Arthur Augustus since the crash.

Blake's face whitened. He clambered away at once, careless of the danger of falling back into the water as he searched for his chum. Over the roar of the waters Tom could hear his voice shouting.

But no answer came back.

"Hold on to Dig, Monty!" breathed Tom Merry. Monty Lowther was recovering a little now. He nodded and held on to Dig, and Tom clambered away, seeking a sign of Arthur Augustus in the wilderness of tangled branches through which the Preto foamed and swirled. And Herries, after a few minutes, was in motion, too.

Tom glimpsed the Indian paddlers in a bunch. They had crawled out of the branches to the trunk of the fallen tree and were crawling along it, clinging like monkeys, to clamber through the torn roots to the shore. He saw them disappear one after another through a mass of torn-up trailing roots, clambering to land.

But of O Pepino and the swell of St. Jim's nothing was to be seen.

The fallen tree still barred the river, that rushed and swirled under it and over it, and through the dripping branches. The vast roots held it to the bank, and the roaring Preto failed to tear it away.

So long as it held, the juniors in the branches were safe, while they could keep their hold. Of the canoe Tom saw nothing but a broken paddle, jammed in a forked bough.

The thunder had ceased to roll. The wind still lashed the echoing forest and the rain came heavily, but the brief fury of the tropical storm was spent. Every minute the rain fell less heavily.

With the easing of the storm came safety—for those that were saved. But there were two who were gone—and they had to realise, at last, that Arthur Augustus and O Pepino had been swept past the fallen tree and had gained no hold, as the others had done. And they knew then that by that time the two missing ones must be far down the river, and shuddered to think of them rolling over and over, lifeless, in the raging flood.

"Allons! Venez!" said the French trader, at last.

"But Gussy—" groaned Blake.

"Perhaps we find ze ozzers on ze land!" said Gaston. "Allons! It needs zat we go—suivez moi."

The juniors followed him. The storm was slackening more and more, but it was no easy task to clamber along the swaying, bobbing trunk, that dipped in the tossing water, to the bank. But slowly and surely, one after another, they won their way along and clambered and struggled through torn-up roots and reached the bank, which the Indians had reached half an hour before them.

They struggled out of the mass of roots of the fallen ceiba, and stood in the forest, in the drenching rain. Gaston's face was set and hard.

"Co scelerat!" he muttered. "Zat scoundrel!"

He was thinking of Joao Rabeira. But the juniors were thinking of their missing chum, swept away in the mad waters of the swollen river.

Joao Rabeira was far from them; they had swept at least five miles down the raging river before the crash came. But where was D'Arcy? It was to find and rescue his brother, lost in the wilds of Brazil, that Arthur Augustus was in that wilderness of danger and death, and Tom Merry & Co. felt, with heavy hearts, that it was not to save him, but to share his unknown fate, that Arthur Augustus had come.

FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY did not know what was happening to him. When the canoe struck he grasped at the branches of the ceiba, lost his grasp, and plunged, and a second later he was sweeping away under the tree, whirling away down the Black River at dizzy speed.

His head came to the surface, but he saw nothing of his friends; already he was swept far beyond the fallen tree, to which they were clinging. Half-suffocated, with swimming brain, he struck out for his life, rolled and tossed on the waters amid whirling masses of driftwood that swept down the wild current round him.

The forest-clad banks were a blur of rain. Tossing like a cork on the wild waters, he strove to keep himself afloat, but again and again the maddened river rolled over him and his strength was fast going. Then, through the roar of the waters, a voice reached him.

"Meu patroa! O Senhor Um Olho!"

He knew that it was O Pepino. "Um Olho," or "One-Eye," was the name by which the black man called him.

He could not see O Pepino, but a minute after the shout reached him a grasp was laid on him and his sinking head was dragged up from the water.

He caught a glimpse of a black face.

"Cucumbah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

But his voice was only a faint whisper. He was at his last gasp.

The negro's strong grasp bore him up. With one hand grasping the swell of St. Jim's, the other brawny black arm thrown over a drifting log, O Pepino kept them both afloat as they whirled on down the rushing, swollen river.

Arthur Augustus, exhausted, hung helpless in the black man's grasp.

But he needed to make no effort. O Pepino's strong hand held him safely. And it seemed to

him that, as they whirled on down the river, the black man was steering with his powerful legs, for the log to which he clung swerved in to the bank. Again and again wild eddies drove it out, but every time the black man steered shoreward again, till at last the log crashed into a mass of tangled thickets half-submerged by the flood.

O Pepino let go the log and grasped the trailing tendrils. The wild buffeting of the maddened waters did not seem to have affected the giant strength of the black Hercules. With his right arm he dragged himself from the water, Arthur Augustus circled by his left. Neck deep in water, then knee-deep in water and splashing mud, he dragged himself through the thickets and stood at last on the bank, with Arthur Augustus like a bundle under his arm.

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus dizzily.

He could hardly believe that he was saved. O Pepino laid him on the earth; he was too weak to stand. Arthur Augustus blinked up at the gigantic form that bent over him, sheltering him from the lashing rain that came down through the forest branches.

"Bai Jove! You are a weal bwick, Cucumbah!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

Cucumber gave him a grin.

"Bom!" he said.

Arthur Augustus lay without motion for a time. But as his strength revived he sat up, O Pepino's sinewy arm supporting him.

"The othahs!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

He was saved. Cucumber had saved him. But his first thought was for his comrades.

Some of them must have saved themselves in the branches of the fallen tree. Arthur Augustus knew without being told that the negro could have done so, if he had chosen. It was of his own will that the negro had followed when "Senhor Um Olho" was swept away down the river. Cucumber had been thinking only of him and Arthur Augustus was grateful, but his thoughts were with his comrades.

"My fwends!" he exclaimed. "My fwends, Cucumbah!"

O Pepino shook his head. He understood no English beyond a few words he had picked up from the juniors during the expedition up the Black River.

"Did you see anythin' of them, Cucumbah?"

"Nao entendo, senhor."

"No, of course you don't understand, old chap," said Arthur Augustus. "But I must go and look for them at once."

He struggled to his feet with O Pepino's assistance. Through the trees he could see the roaring yellow flood of the Preto, sweeping on its way to the distant quinta from which the expedition had started a week ago.

O Pepino pointed down the river.

Arthur Augustus looked in the direction of the pointing black finger, and then stared at the black man.

His friends had been left up the river, unless they had been, like himself, torn away by the flood, and without a helping hand to save them. He knew that he must have been swept many miles below the spot where the fallen ceiba barred the Rio Preto.

"What do you mean, old chap?" asked Arthur Augustus. "My fwends are up the wivah, not down! Nao entendo!" he added in Portuguese.

"A quinta!" said O Pepino.

Then Arthur Augustus understood.

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The Quinta da Silva, the home of the French trader and planter, was a good seventy miles down the Rio Preto. That distance had taken a week's navigation in the canoe. On foot, tramping in the primeval forest, it was likely to take much longer, if Arthur Augustus had thought of taking that direction. Now that the canoe was wrecked, and his comrades lost, it was O Pepino's idea to convey his patroa back to the quinta and safety—an idea that was not likely to recommend itself to Arthur Augustus.

"Wats!" he said.

"A quinta!" repeated O Pepino.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No," he answered. "I mean, nao. I am goin' to look for my friends. Senhor Moutarde," he added. That name made his meaning clear to the black man.

O Pepino understood, but he shook his black woolly head.

"Morto," he said.

Arthur Augustus could guess the meaning of that word.

"Dead or alive, I'm goin' to find them!" he said. "You can please yourself, Cucumbah—I'm goin' up the wivah!"

And he made a step.

"Sim, Senhor Um Olho," said O Pepino reluctantly. It was clear that the black man was anxious to guide his patroa safe back to the quinta and save him, whatever might become of the rest of the party. But Arthur Augustus' word was law to O Pepino and he did not argue the point. Probably Cucumbah had little hope that the others had escaped from the wreck of the canoe.

"Venha," he said.

The rain was still coming down, though it was thinning now. Both of them were bareheaded; the big hats had been swept away in the river. That mattered little till the sunshine came back. O Pepino led the way, his sharp machete in his hand to clear a path.

In a few minutes they lost sight of the river, which was Arthur Augustus' only guide. That guide lost, he was likely to wander down the Preto as up, for to him the Brazilian forest was trackless. But for the black man he would have been hopelessly lost in a few minutes, and must have wandered aimlessly in the immense forest till he sank down from exhaustion.

But O Pepino knew his way by a hundred signs that Arthur Augustus could not see. But progress was slow, for the forest was thick and tangled, and Arthur Augustus was far from recovered from the exhausting struggle in the river. O Pepino slashed a way through lianas as thick as ropes that streamed rain as he cut them, and every now and then gave Arthur Augustus a helping hand over a fallen bough or an uprooted tree.

The rain ceased at last and a glint of sunshine came through the masses of foliage overhead.

The storm was over and the rich red of the sunset glowed through the forest. But the red glow gave place to dusk and dark. How O Pepino threaded his way onward in the gloom Arthur Augustus did not begin to guess. But the black man did not pause, except to help the tottering schoolboy over difficult places.

It seemed to Arthur Augustus that endless weary miles had passed under his aching legs. But he did not dream of stopping. O Pepino was able to guide him back to the spot where the canoe had been wrecked, and so long as he could put one foot before another Gussy was going on. His heart was heavy with anxiety for his friends.

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and until he knew their fate he could not rest.

Suddenly O Pepino came to a halt.

He looked back at Arthur Augustus, and the flash of his dazzling teeth showed in the gloom as he grinned.

"Bom," he said.

"Good?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What is it, my dear chap?"

"Um fogo," said O Pepino.

"A fog?" asked Arthur Augustus, mystified.

"O fogo," said Cucumbah.

The black man pointed. Faintly from the distant darkness a flicker of light came to Arthur Augustus' eyes. It was the distant gleam of a camp-fire.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Fogo means fire, does it? Bai Jove, if that should be my friends—"

He grasped a black arm and hurried O Pepino on. And as he did so there came the sudden ring of a rifle-shot, and the next instant the gleam of the camp-fire vanished.

THE BANDIT'S ATTACK!

GASTON MOUTARDE sat on a log, cleaning his rifle, a black frown on his face. Tom Merry & Co. were bunched by the camp-fire with clouded faces. Night had fallen on the Brazilian forest, deep and dark, the starlight shut off by the thick arched branches.

There were grim faces in the St. Jim's camp.

In the brief spell of sunshine after the storm, they had camped, the Indians sorting out wood dry enough for a fire from the recesses of the forest. The schoolboys were worn out; but more than fatigue they felt the heavy weight of anxiety for their missing chum.

The wreck of the canoe was an irreparable blow to the voyagers up the Black River. The canoe itself was a wreck hidden somewhere under the waters of the Preto, and most of the outfit had gone with the canoe.

Only two rifles and a revolver had been saved of the firearms. There were plenty of cartridges in waterproof cases. Each of the juniors had his knife and machete, which had been fastened to their belts. But even with a well-supplied canoe to use on the river, that expedition into the unknown desert of Brazil had been a dubious proposition. Now it seemed hopeless. The juniors could read that thought in the grim face of the French trader.

Gaston was as keen as the St. Jim's juniors to find Lord Conway—his "friend Lord," as he called him. But if success had been problematic before, it was doubly so now.

Somewhere in the wilderness, far ahead of the St. Jim's party, lurked Joao Rabeira's desperate gang of outcast bravoos. And in the forests circling the upper waters of the Preto were tribes of fierce Caraya Indians, never yet subdued by Brazilian rule. The outlook was grim—but Tom Merry & Co. would not have balked at it had Arthur Augustus been still with them. But now their thoughts were not concentrated on Lord Conway, whom they had hoped to find and rescue, but on Gussy. They had to learn D'Arcy's fate, alive or dead, before they took another step onward in their desperate journey or homeward to the quinta on the lower Preto.

"There's a chance," said Blake in a low voice for the dozenth time. "There's a chance, you fellows! That nigger's gone, too, and it stands to reason that that big nigger could have saved him—"

self if we did. Doesn't it look as if he saw Gussy go and went after him?"

"It does," agreed Tom Merry.

"We've got to know," muttered Dig.

"I—I suppose it's ten to one that old Gussy went down," mumbled Herries. "But he may be ashore somewhere miles down the river. We've got to start hunting for him at daylight."

"There's a jolly good chance that O Pepino went after him to help him," said Manners. "Let's bank on that till we know."

"I nearly went," said Lowther, with a shiver. "If Tom hadn't got hold of me—"

"Thank goodness I did, old chap," said Tom.

The juniors were eating, or trying to eat, their supper. Most of the supplies were gone. They chewed at carne seca, a dried meat that was almost as hard as leather, and hard mandioca bread softened by soaking in water.

Gaston, as he chewed, cleaned his rifle. The firearms had been soaked and were useless till cleaned, and he had not forgotten that Joao Rabeira was only a few miles away.

It was probable that the desperado was assured that he had sent his enemies to their death. But the ruffian was not a man to leave anything to chance. More likely than not he would search the banks of the Preto for traces of the wreck.

At intervals Gaston's keen black eyes shot suspicious glances at the surrounding forest.

The gleam of the camp-fire showed to a considerable distance among the dark trunks. If the bravo was in search, it might serve as a guide if he came within the radius of its glow.

But that was a risk that had to be run, for the night was cold, the trees dripping with moisture from the rain, and the juniors' clothes not yet dry.

"It's a knock-out losing the canoe," said Blake after a long silence. "But I wouldn't care if only old Gussy was here! We could manage to push on somehow—and, by gum, I'd like to get a knock at that villain Rabeira!"

There was a sudden spurt of blaze from the fire, and embers were knocked in all directions.

The juniors started to their feet.

"What—" exclaimed Manners.

Something whizzing from the forest had struck in the camp-fire. The next moment, the juniors knew what it was, as the report of a rifle rolled from the darkness.

There was a shout from Gaston.

"On ze face! Quick!"

The juniors threw themselves down on the earth. Gaston, dropping his rifle, seized an armful of damp fuel, and crashed it on the camp-fire.

In a moment the light was extinguished. Black smoke rolled up from the fire, but there was no gleam of flame.

Crack, crack! came twice from the surrounding darkness.

The sudden blotting out of the camp-fire saved the St. Jim's party. But the bullets flew close over them as they lay on the ground. They heard Gaston muttering savagely in French, close at hand, unseen in the gloom.

"Rabeira!" breathed Tom Merry.

"That villain!" said Blake between his teeth.

"He's come to make sure!"

It could not be doubted that it was Joao Rabeira who was lurking in the forest, firing into the camp. The St. Jim's juniors listened with bated breath for another shot.

If the desperado came to close quarters, Gaston

was a match for him, and they did not fear him. But if he lurked in the darkness, pumping bullets into the camp, that was another proposition. He had got a fairly accurate range before the fire was blotted out. As for firing in return, even if the firearms had been in good order, that was futile—there was nothing to guide a shot, and the sound of the reports showed that the bandit changed his position after each shot.

Crack!

Tom Merry gave a shuddering start. Something passed between his arm and his body, and was buried in the soft earth.

He shut his teeth on a cry.

He was not hit; the damp sleeve of his thin cotton jacket was hardly torn. But the escape had been terribly narrow, and it proved how accurately the bandit had his range.

Crack! came again after the lapse of a minute. The shot came from a different direction, and it sounded closer. There was a gasp from Digby.

"Hurt, old man?" breathed Blake.

"No! I felt the wind of it!" gasped Dig.

"Zat you keep close, and zat you keep silent!" came a whisper from Gaston Moutarde. "Zat scelerat, he have ze ears of ze puma to hear! Silence, done."

The juniors kept silent. Even a whisper might have reached wary ears and guided a shot. Their hearts beat thickly as they lay cramped on the soft, damp earth. They had expected to meet Joao Rabeira again in the wilds of the Black River, but this was not how they had hoped to meet him. They were almost at the mercy of the merciless desperado.

There was a glimmer of steel in the gloom as Gaston Moutarde grasped his machete. The French trader hoped and longed that the bandit would seek to come to close quarters.

But Joao was too cunning for that. Lurking in the blackness round the camp, he loosed off shot after shot, changing his position every time, and every bullet came close.

Tom Merry suppressed an exclamation as a red flicker came to his eyes in the darkness. The fire, damped down and darkened, was burning through. And if that flicker was followed by a burst of blaze, it meant a stream of bullets from the dark forest, crashing through flesh and bone.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS!

"CUCUMBAH!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He stared into the blackness of the forest before him.

The camp-fire, on which his eyes had been fixed in the hope that it meant that his friends were there, had disappeared. Something had suddenly blotted out its gleam.

He heard O Pepino's hissing voice at his side.

"O inimigo!" breathed the black man. "O inimigo do, senhor."

"The enemy!" repeated Arthur Augustus. He knew the meaning of the Portuguese word "inimigo."

"Sim, senhor, o inimigo!" whispered O Pepino. His grasp of Arthur Augustus' arm drew him to a halt.

The swell of St. Jim's stood still, peering into the darkness. The black man, he believed, could see more than he could see—and had seen more before the fire was blotted out. Never had the

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difference of language been so bitterly exasperating.

"What did you see, Cucumbah?" breathed Arthur Augustus. "I mean—oh ewikey, I wish I could speak Portuguese, or you could speak English, old boy. Bai Jove! There is anotheah shot."

Another shot rang out, and another, followed at intervals by others. The echoes rolled through the dim forest, and it sounded almost like volleying. But Arthur Augustus knew that it was a single rifle. But who was firing, whether his friends or his foes, he could not guess—or, indeed, whether all parties concerned were strangers to him.

O Pepino was listening like a wolf. But he moved on slowly at last, drawing Arthur Augustus after him.

He stopped again suddenly.

There was a flash in the darkness a little distance ahead, followed by a report. They were close on the unknown, unseen rifleman.

"Espere!" whispered O Pepino. "Nao se va embora."

Gussy had heard that phrase before, and he knew that it meant "Wait, don't go away." He remained standing still as the negro glided away, silent-footed, in the forest.

Arthur Augustus' heart was throbbing with anxiety. If that camp-fire meant that his friends were there, and if the firing meant that they were being attacked, it was bitter enough to stand idle and wait. But he was helpless to do anything else—he could not have found his way in the dark forest without the negro's help.

He knew, too, that O Pepino had gone to investigate, creeping silently through the undergrowth with all the stealth of a Redskin.

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

He peered intently through the gloom. He did not stir from the spot where he had been left—that would only mean difficulty for O Pepino in finding him again. He could only wait for the black man to return.

Dark as it was, he could make out the shapes of the trees and hanging creepers, his eyes having grown accustomed to the gloom.

He gave a start and caught his breath as a mass of rosy lianas parted within a couple of yards of him, and a dark figure appeared.

His lips opened to speak, in the belief that it was O Pepino returning. But he shut them again without a sound.

The figure he saw had a big grass-hat on its head, and he knew that the negro had lost his hat in the river.

It was not O Pepino.

Arthur Augustus stilled his breathing. If it was an enemy, he was at that enemy's mercy if he was seen; he had no weapon but the hunting-knife in his belt—even his machete was gone. His hand groped silently to the haft of the knife. If this was an enemy, if he was attacked, he was going to put up what fight he could.

The figure stood not more than six feet away, its back to him. He could now make out a rifle under the arm.

The big hat was tilted, as if the man had bent his head to listen. Then he saw the figure stir, and heard a muttered word.

"Bom!"

A thrill ran through the St. Jim's junior. It seemed to him that the voice that muttered that word in Portuguese was familiar to his ears.

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His heart beat faster at the thought that it was Joao Rabeira who stood there, ignorant of his presence, almost within reach of his hand.

Arthur Augustus stood very still.

Evidently the bandit was utterly unaware of his presence. His attention was concentrated on the camp, at which he had been firing. That the swell of St. Jim's was in the forest, at a little distance from the camp, Rabeira could not possibly know or guess. He had changed his position a dozen times during his fusillade at the camp, and his last change of position had brought him to the spot where the negro had left Arthur Augustus. Not for a moment did the bandit, wary as he was, dream that anyone was standing within a few feet behind him.

The cause of his ejaculation "Good!" was visible to Arthur Augustus a few moments later.

From the darkness came a flicker of light.

Arthur Augustus could guess easily enough that it came from the camp-fire. He had already guessed that the fire had been suddenly damped down when the shooting started. Now it was flickering up again.

The figure in front of him lifted the rifle. It was clamped to a shoulder, aimed through the openings of the trees at that red flicker.

Arthur Augustus set his teeth.

He was almost sure that it was Rabeira who stood before him. Whoever it was, he was firing on a camp, and the rising flicker of the fire was the guide for his next shot.

Only too well Arthur Augustus knew what O Pepino would have done in his place. The knife would have been drawn and buried to the hilt between the shoulders of that dim figure before him.

But even if he had been sure that it was Rabeira, Arthur Augustus could not have adopted the savage methods of the "sertao." His hand was on his knife—but he could draw it only in defence. But if that was Rabeira firing on his friends, Arthur Augustus was not the man to stand idle while he pulled trigger.

The flicker became a sudden blaze. It was more than enough to guide a rifle-shot.

But even as Joao's finger was on the trigger, Arthur Augustus leaped forward and delivered a terrific thump from his clenched fist in the middle of his back.

A startled howl left Joao's lips as he pitched heavily forward, utterly taken by surprise, and crashed down.

His rifle roared as he fell, dropping from his hands. The bandit crashed down on his face, and Arthur Augustus, in an instant, had grabbed up the fallen rifle.

"Nossa senhora!" He heard a panting voice and knew that it was Joao's: "Corpo de Deus!"

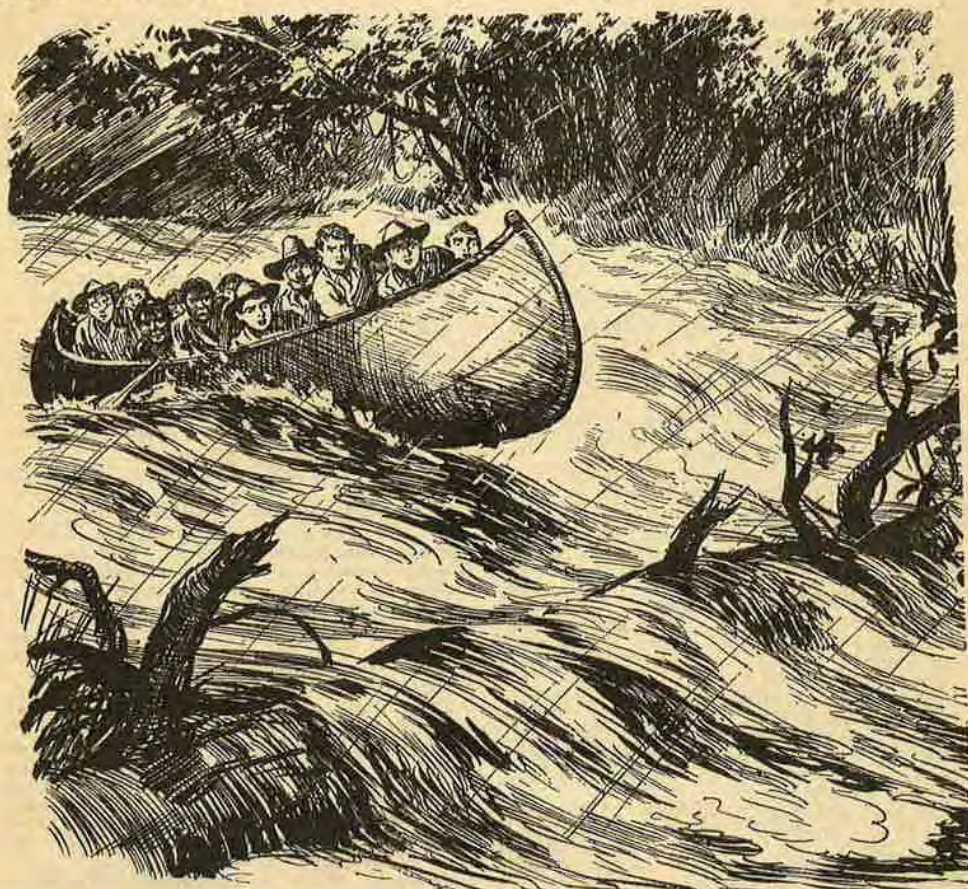
The bandit sprang up and whirled round, his hand on a knife.

But he whirled round to find his own rifle clamped to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's shoulder and the muzzle staring him in the face.

That muzzle was not two feet from the enraged face of the Brazilian bandit, and Arthur Augustus' finger was on the trigger. If there was one cartridge left in the magazine he was safe.

Evidently there was, for Joao, as he glared at the rifle-muzzle, made a backward leap that carried him six or seven feet away from it. Arthur Augustus hardly had time to pull trigger, even if he desired to do so, before the bandit had dodged behind a tree-trunk.

His savage voice was heard for a moment



Swept on by the wild flood waters, the canoe rushed towards inevitable disaster !

lapping out Portuguese oaths. Then there was a rustle in the thickets, and Arthur Augustus knew that the bandit was circling round in cover to take him at close quarters, knife in hand.

A mass of lianas stirred within a few feet of him—and the swell of St. Jim's pulled trigger and sent a bullet crashing into the creepers.

A fierce yell answered the shot and a sound of a rapidly receding rustle. Then, from another direction, came a calling voice.

"Meu patrao! Senhor Um Olho!" O Pepino was returning.

"Here, Cucumbah!" called Arthur Augustus.

The flicker of the camp-fire vanished again, damped down by a mass of fuel. But O Pepino, as he joined the swell of St. Jim's, waved a big black hand in the direction where it burned.

"Amigos!" he said.

Arthur Augustus knew that that meant friends.

"Oh, good!" he gasped. He understood that O Pepino had gone near enough to the camp to find out that it was the St. Jim's party—or the survivors, at least.

"O que!" gasped O Pepino, as he discerned the

rifle in Arthur Augustus' hands and stared at it in wonder.

"That wascal Wabeiwah was firin' on the camp!" said Arthur Augustus. "I gwabbed his wife. Oh, bai Jove, I keep on forgettin' that you don't undahstand! Get on to the camp, Cucumbah, if they are our fwiends! Oh ewikey, I hope I shall find the fellows all safe! Huwwy up, Cucumbah!"

The rustling made by the bandit in his retreat had died away.

Close as he was to the camp, Arthur Augustus would hardly have found it now that the gleam of the camp-fire had again disappeared. But O Pepino led him on, and Arthur Augustus shouted as he followed the black man:

"Mistah Mustard! Tom Mewwy! Don't shoot, deah boys—it's all wight!"

REUNITED !

TOM MERRY & CO. fairly bounded.

Cramped on the earth, getting what cover they could from the darkness and from the logs on which they had been sitting,

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the St. Jim's fellows were expecting every moment to hear again the crack of the bandit's rifle from the surrounding forest.

Instead of which, a voice came to their ears which made them wonder whether they were dreaming.

"Gussy!" stuttered Blake.

"Did you hear?" gasped Herries.

"Was—that Gussy?" exclaimed Dig.

"Gussy or his ghost!" howled Monty Lowther.

"Where—how—what—"

"Listen!" breathed Tom.

Loud and clear from the darkness came the voice they knew so well, and which they had dreaded that they would never hear again.

"All wight, deah boys! Pway don't pull twiggah—that wascal Wabeiwah is gone—it is I, old beans!"

"Amigos!" came another voice, about ten times as powerful as that of Arthur Augustus.

"Cucumber!" howled Blake.

"Both of them!" breathed Tom. "Oh, thank goodness they're safe!" And he shouted: "This way, Gussy! O.K., old bean!"

"Mon Dieu!" came Gaston's voice in the dark. "C'est le petit—it is the little one with the glass eye! Dieu merci!"

He kicked the camp-fire into a blaze.

"Gussy!" roared Blake, as a dragged figure emerged from the trees and an eyeglass gleamed in the blaze of the camp-fire.

"Gussy, old man!" gasped Dig.

They rushed to greet him. They grabbed him and dragged him into the camp. They almost hugged him.

"Gussy, you old ass!"

"Safe and sound, after all, you fathead!"

"Thank goodness!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Wight as wain! But are all you fellows safe? I have been feahfully wowwied about you fellows—are you all heah?"

"All here, old chap!" said Tom. "You were the only one missing."

"Bai Jovel! This is weally our luckay day!" said Arthur Augustus. "Ow! What are you hittin' me in the back for, Hewwies?"

"Only smacking your back, old bean!" beamed Herries.

"Pway don't bwreak my backbone, old fellow! I am feahfully glad to see you chaps again. I was afwaid somethin' might have happened to you, you know, when my eye was off you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Six rejoicing juniors encircled the swell of St. Jim's. Outside the circle, Monsieur Moutarde gestikulated with glee.

"Allons! Voila le petit! Ze brozzer of my friend Lord he is safe, and it is all left!" chirruped Gaston.

"All right!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Zat I embrace you!" exclaimed Gaston.

"Zis is tip of a top, as you say in English! Zat I embrace you on bofe ze cheek."

"Oh cwikey!"

Monsieur Moutarde embraced Arthur Augustus, kissing him on both cheeks.

"I suppose Cucumber got you out of the river, old chap?" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Old Cucumbah is a weal bwick!"

"And you hung on to your rifle all the time?" said Tom.

"No; my wife went with the canoe, Tom Mewwy."

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"Eh? You've got it there—"

"This isn't my wife, old chap—this is Wabeiwah's."

"Rabeira's!" yelled Blake.

"Yaas; I took it away fwom him."

"You—you—you took Rabeira's rifle away from him!" said Jack Blake, like a fellow in a dream, while the other juniors blinked at Arthur Augustus.

"Mon Dieu!" said Gaston.

"You see, the blightah almost walked into me, and he was goin' to fire on the camp again when I knocked him ovah—"

"You knocked him over!" gurgled Manners.

"Knocked that bandit over!" stuttered Blake.

"Yaas, and gwabbed his wife."

"Oh crumbs!"

"And he wan when I pulled twiggah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "If he hadn't won, I should have widdled him. But he wan, all wight. Bai Jovel! It's wathah wippin' to be back along with you fellows again! I suppose the canoe was lost?"

"Yes, it went, and nearly everything in it," answered Tom.

"I saved my camera!" said Manners.

"So it's all right, you see!" remarked Monty Lowther, with gentle sarcasm. "We've still got Manners' camera in case we run into any Red Indians or bandits! Manners will be able to snap them while they're carving us up."

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" said Manners. "I've lost my films. Lucky I'd just put a fresh roll into the camera. That's a comfort."

The juniors sat down again round the camp-fire. Arthur Augustus, whose noble legs were almost dropping off with fatigue, was glad to get a rest.

Blake and Herries and Dig brought him supper—such as it was! Such as it was, Arthur Augustus was glad of it! He drove his aristocratic teeth with difficulty into carne seca, and chewed mandioca bread.

Monsieur Moutarde talked to O Pepino in Portuguese. Cucumber ducked his woolly head and disappeared into the forest, his machete in his hand.

O Pepino did not share Gussy's fatigue; and the French trader had posted him to keep watch in case the bandit should return to the attack.

"Bai Jovel! This isn't the sort of gwub we get in the studay at St. Jim's, you fellows," remarked Arthur Augustus, as he ceased to chew dried meat, his noble jaws aching from the exertion. "Still, we came here to wuff it! We cannot weally expect wabbit pies and jam woll in the wilds of Bwazil, what?"

"It's really a choice supper, old man!" said Monty Lowther.

"I should not wegard it as exactly choice, Lowthah."

"I mean, it's the sort you chews!" explained Monty.

"Oh cwikey! Is that one of your wotten puns? Howevah, I am vewy glad even to heah you punnin' again, old chap, wotten as your puns are!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is weally wippin' to see all you fellows safe awound me. I was goin' to keep an eye on you all when the canoe cwashed, but somehow or othah I seem to have got washed away when you fellows didn't—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, it is all wight; and aftah a night's west, we shall feel up to goin' on. It means Shanks' pony, but that cannot be helped. A spot of foot-sloggin' won't hurt us! In fact, it will be good twainin'—we shall have a lot of foot-sloggin' to do latah on when we go into the Militia. There's a good side to ewewythin', you know."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Blake. "But I fancy Gaston's got some idea of chucking it and hitting the quinta again."

"Wubbish!"

"You see, old bean," said Tom Merry, "we've lost practically everything—"

"Yaas, but wemembah what King What's-his-name said aftah the Battle of What-do-you-call-it," said Arthur Augustus. "Ewewythin' is lost but honah!"

"Oh, quite! But—"

"And the French soldiers used to say that with bwead and iron you can get to China!" said Arthur Augustus. "And the more we lose, the less we shall have to cawwy, you know."

"You talk like a picture-book, old man!" said Tom. "But—"

"Pewwaps I had better send you fellows back, though," said Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully. "I can keep on with old Cucumbah. It would wathah welieve my mind if you fellows were safe at the quinta. What do you think?"

"I'll tell you what I think," said Blake. "I think I'll boot you off that log if you talk any more rot."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Mon cher!" Gaston Moutarde broke in. "I zink it is necessary to be of return. In ze morning I zink you go back to ze quinta."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on the French trader.

"I have not found my bwothah yet, Mr. Mustard!" he pointed out. "I am not goin' back without old Conway."

Monsieur Moutarde shook his head.

"Moi," he said. "I will keep on. All zat can be done for you my friend Lord, I will do! But you garçons—you will be of return to ze quinta, and O Pepino will guide you safe and sound and all left! Voila!"

"Sowwy to argue with you, sir, as you have been so vewwy good to us," answered Arthur Augustus. "But I am goin' on at dawn."

"Pas possible, for ze boys—" said Gaston, shaking his head.

"Pewwaps you are wight, sir," admitted Arthur Augustus. "But possible or not, I am goin' on all the same. Pewwaps you had better take these fellows back to the quinta, and I will keep on with old Cucumbah, and— Yawwooh! What are you doin', Blake, you howlin' ass?"

"Booting you!" answered Blake. "Didn't I say I would boot you if you talked any more rot?"

"Ow! You uttah ass!"

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry. "We're all going on, Gussy, if you go on. But—"

The juniors all looked at Monsieur Moutarde. Gaston shrugged his shoulders up to his ears.

"Allons! It is all left," he said. "Ve goes on in ze morning!"

And that point being settled, the St. Jim's juniors settled down to sleep round the campfire, while the faithful Cucumber kept watch and ward.

GUSSY GETS THE JAGUAR!

BRIGHT dawn gleamed down on the rolling Preto and the Brazilian forest. Tom Merry & Co. were early astir.

It was settled that they were pushing on, under much more difficult and dangerous conditions than hitherto. But no fellow in the party was really desirous of turning back.

Thirty miles of wild forest and swampy river lay between them and their objective, the Ilha dos Macacos, the Island of Monkeys, in the Rio Preto. It had to be done by foot-slogging now that the canoe was gone.

The four Indian paddlers were sent back. They were of no further use, but Gaston gave them instructions to bring another canoe up the river to wait at a certain point for the party on their return. That was a prudent precaution—if the party ever returned! All the juniors knew well enough that that was doubtful.

According to the letter Arthur Augustus had received from his brother, Lord Conway had discovered on the Island of Monkeys the treasure of Potomayo, the revolutionary general who had fled long years ago into the wilds. That was known to Joao Rabeira and his "banda" of desperate outcasts. Lord Conway, lost in the trackless wilderness, was hunted by the bandits to wring from him the secret of the exact location of the treasure on the swampy island in the Black River. The task of finding him and rescuing him was one compared with which the search for the proverbial needle in a haystack was rather easy and simple!

Gaston knew the Ilha dos Macacos—he had once visited it in the course of his trade up-country with the wild Caraya Indians. The juniors could not have expected, on their own, to pick it out from the scores of other islands in the Black River. And even when they reached it their task was not at its end, but only at its beginning.

But Arthur Augustus did not think of faltering for a moment, and his comrades were prepared to back him up to the last shot in the locker. But as the juniors were making their preparations to start after breakfast in the glimmering dawn, the swell of St. Jim's was noticed to have a very thoughtful and worried expression on his noble countenance.

"It will be feahfully hot pwesently, you fellows," Arthur Augustus remarked at last.

"Most likely," agreed Tom. "What about that, Gussy?"

"I lost my hat in the wiyah yestahday," said Arthur Augustus. "A fellow can wun about without his hat at home, but not in Bwazil! The sun is wathah too hot for that. What the dooce am I goin' to do for a hat?"

"Ask Cucumbah to lend you one!" suggested Lowther.

"Cucumbah lost his hat also, Lowthah—and anyhow, I could not bag his hat," said Arthur Augustus.

"He can lend you a bola!" said Monty.

"Are you wandewin' in your mind, Lowthah? Cucumbah does not weah a bowlah hat," said Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh ewumbs! Are you makin' wotten puns again, Lowthah? Weally, you ass—"

"Senhor Um Olho!" O Pepino butted into the discussion. The juniors looked round at him.

There was a plumed grass-hat on Cucumbah's

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woolly head. There was another in his big black hand.

He grinned and extended it to Arthur Augustus.

"Um chapou, Senhor Um Olho!" said O Pepino.

"I suppose shappayoo is Portuguese for hat," said Arthur Augustus. "But where the dooce has Cucumbah got these hats from?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"They're easier to make than your silk toppers at home, Gussy! Cucumbah's found the materials growing here, and he's plaited them himself."

"Bai Jove! He is a feahfully clevah chap!" said Arthur Augustus. "Fancy a chap bein' able to make a hat just like a battah, you know! How do you say you are vewy much obliged in Portuguese, Tom Mewwy?"

"Muito obrigado."

"Yaas, that's it! I knew it was somethin', you know, but I could not wemembah what. I am pwetty good at languages, and I should get on all wight if I could only wemembah the words, and what they mean. Muito obrigado, Cucumbah!"

"Nada, senhor, nada!" said O Pepino, grinning and ducking his woolly head.

"I suppose nada means somethin' in Portuguese."

"It doesn't!" grinned Tom. "It means 'nothing.'"

"Yaas, wathah, I wemembah that now. I wecollect it!" Arthur Augustus put on the big, shady grass hat. "Bai Jove! It's quite a good fit, weally. You are a bwick, Cucumbah! Muito—thingummy—what do you call it? I shall be vewy glad of this hat when the sun gets up a little highah. Cucumbah, old bean, muito thingummy!"

"Thingummy," probably, was a new one to O Pepino, but he nodded and grinned.

The juniors had few preparations to make—now that Gussy was provided with a hat to shade his noble head from the tropical sun.

What had been saved of the outfit in the canoe was divided into bundles, which were small and light enough to be easily carried. Food—such as it was—packed into a very small compass—there was nothing but carne seca and a little native bread. But there were masses of fruits growing wild in the forest, and the St. Jim's fellows were able to help themselves to all the bananas and plantains and nuts that they could eat. They had to "live on the country" as they advanced deeper into the untrodden wilds.

Gaston and Cucumbah led the way—the French trader watchful, with his rifle under his arm, O Pepino wielding his machete to clear the way when it was blocked by tropical luxuriance—which was very frequently the case.

Tom Merry also had a rifle under his arm, and Arthur Augustus carried the rifle that had belonged to Joao Rabeira. That firearm was a welcome addition to the limited armament of the adventurers, but it did not seem to add to the peace of mind of Arthur Augustus' comrades.

Blake, feeling something poke him in the back as they filed through the forest, glanced round and ejaculated:

"What's that?"

"All wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "It was only the muzzle of my wifie."

"What?" yelled Blake

"I was shiftn' it to my othah arm," explained

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Arthur Augustus. "I twust it did not hurt you, Blake! It was only a vewy light tap."

Jack Blake looked at his noble chum as if he could have bitten him.

"You blithering idiot!" he hissed.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You dangerous maniac!" roared Blake.

"Is anythin' the mattah, Blake?"

"Something will be the matter if you don't point that rifle upward!" yelled Blake. "Something will be the matter with your face! Your nose will be knocked through the back of your head! See?"

"Wats!"

However, Arthur Augustus sloped his rifle with the muzzle upwards—to the general relief. But as the sun rose higher, and the steamy heat of the tropical forest became more and more oppressive, the weight of a rifle began to tell. Arthur Augustus shifted it to his other shoulder, and caught the trigger in a trailing creeper.

Bang!

"Bai Jove!"

Gaston came spinning round, finger on trigger. O Pepino rushed back, machete in hand. The party came to a startled halt as Gussy's bullet went soaring through thick branches overhead.

"Vat—!" exclaimed Gaston.

"O inimigo!" panted Cucumbah.

"Bai Jove! It's all wight!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Nothin' the mattah—only my wifie went off somehow. Oh ewikey! What's that?"

There was a sound of crashing and wild rustling in the foliage overhead. It sounded as if some heavy body was falling, crashing from branch to branch.

The juniors jumped clear of the spot, all eyes staring upwards, every hand grasping a weapon. From the branches a sinuous spotted body hurtled, crashing on the earth almost at their feet.

"Jaguar!" gasped Gaston.

"Gweat Scott!"

The Frenchman's rifle was aimed instantly. O Pepino's machete rose in the air. But neither was needed.

The great cat of the forest lay dead on the earth.

Not even a howl had come from the jaguar as it was struck. By the strangest freak of chance, the random bullet had struck a vital spot, and killed the savage animal instantaneously. Arthur Augustus gazed at it like a fellow in a dream as it lay.

"B-b-bai Jove!" he stuttered. "Oh, by Jove!"

Tom Merry & Co. stared blankly at the dead jaguar, and stared at the swell of St. Jim's. It was very likely that the fierce beast had been lurking in the branches, watching the party as they passed below, and preparing to spring upon one of them. If that was so, Arthur Augustus, by happy chance, had put paid to the jaguar just in time.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry. "Gussy, how—"

"The wifie went off," gasped Arthur Augustus. "I—I think the twiggah must have caught on somethin'—"

"Oh my hat!"

"And—that howwid beast was up in the twee!" stuttered Arthur Augustus.

"Good old Gussy!" said Monty Lowther.

"He's got a jaguar this time! He'll get one of us next!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I zink," said Gaston Montarde, in a very dry

tone—"I zink it is verree lucky zat ze jaguar he is keel, but I zink also zat ven of ze ozzers had better carry zat rifle."

"I should jolly well think so!" breathed Blake.

"Weally, Mistah Mustard—"

"I'll carry it for you, Gussy, old man!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"C'est ca!" said Monsieur Moutarde. "Zis time he is verree lucky—anozzer time he may bring ze enemy on to us! Zat you hand over ze rifle, mon petit!"

Arthur Augustus reluctantly relinquished the rifle to George Herries.

Monsieur Moutarde was firm on that point—with the unanimous support of the whole St. Jim's party. They did not want that lucky shot to be followed by an unlucky one.

But O Pepino was gazing at Arthur Augustus with wonder and awe in his black face.

Not understanding English, O Pepino was unaware that the rifle had gone off by accident, and that the bullet had found an utterly unlooked-for and unexpected billet! To O Pepino's eyes, Arthur Augustus had shot dead the most dangerous enemy of the perilous forest—killed it stone dead, in its deep cover in the foliage, with a single shot! O Pepino's admiration was unbounded.

"E possivel!" exclaimed O Pepino. "Mou patrao e cacador illustre—grande! Grande cacador meu patrao, Senhor Um Olho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

And Gaston chuckled.

"Bai Joye! What is Cucumbah sayin', Tom Mowwy, if you can undahstand him?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha! He's saying that his master, Mister One-Eye, is a great and illustrious hunter!" howled Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the other juniors.

"He thinks you meant to get that jaguar!" chortled Tom. "Some shot—if you had!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

O Pepino stared round, puzzled by the merriment of the St. Jim's juniors.

"Cacador illustre!" he said. "Grande cacador, Senhor Um Olho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Allons!" grinned Gaston, and he went back to the head of the line, and the march was resumed, the dead jaguar left where it had fallen.

And George Herries kept possession of Gussy's rifle—which the whole party considered was safer in his keeping than in Gussy's—"grande cacador" as O Pepino believed Arthur Augustus to be!

THE PECCARIES!

"INDIANS!"

Gaston nodded.

It was the following morning. After a day's march, the St. Jim's explorers had camped in the deep forest, and Tom Merry & Co. had slept as soundly—or more soundly than they had been wont to sleep in the dormitories of St. Jim's.

Hardly ten miles had been covered in the day's march—but it was tough going, and over long spaces a way had to be hacked in the tropical undergrowth.

Tired to the bone, the schoolboys slept almost like logs, while Gaston and O Pepino watched in turns.

Willingly the juniors would have taken their turn on guard, but Gaston only shook his head

and smiled at the suggestion. Even when he allowed O Pepino to relieve him, the French trader slept with one eye open, as it were. But there had been no alarm, either during the day's march or during the night's rest, and if Joao Rabeira was still following on, he was keeping his distance. It seemed to the juniors more likely that now his last desperate attempt to stop the party had failed, he had gone on ahead of them to join up with his gang of bravoes at the Ilha dos Macacos. That, however, was only conjecture, and vigilance did not relax for a moment.

As they ate their breakfast in the sunrise, the juniors noticed that Gaston and O Pepino were talking together in Portuguese, in low, earnest tones, with serious faces—Gaston grim, and the usual grin quite missing from Cucumbah's broad black face.

Both of them left the camp and went into the forest, though not out of sight. The juniors could see O Pepino pointing out something to Monsieur Moutarde, who stooped and examined the earth with keen, searching eyes.

"Something's up!" said Tom. He wondered whether, after all, Rabeira had been lurking about the camp during the night.

"Whatevah it is, old Cucumbah's spotted it," said Arthur Augustus. "Fwightfully useful chap, old Cucumbah!"

Gaston came back into the camp with a grave face. He smiled faintly as seven pairs of eyes turned questioningly on him.

"It is ze track," he said. "O Pepino see ze track of ze Caraya. It is ze footprint of ze naked foot."

It was then that the juniors exclaimed all together:

"Indians!"

So far Tom Merry & Co. had seen only a single specimen of the wild Indians who dwelt in the forests and swamps of the sertao—the desert. Ambushed on one of the islands in the Black River, he had loosed off an arrow at their canoe. But they knew that they were now close on the Caraya country. The actual settlements of the Indians were far away, but wandering parties of Red hunters traversed the forests on both banks of the Preto, and an encounter was possible at any time.

Many of the Caraya tribes, Gaston had told them, were friendly—or, at least, indifferent to the white men, so long as they were left alone. But there were warlike tribes in the dim unknown sertao who had hardly ever seen the face of a white man, and to whom the Brazilian Government was only a name—if, indeed, they had heard of it at all.

It was such a tribe that had massacred General Potomayo and his followers, who had fled to the wilds after an unsuccessful revolution twenty years ago. Blood had been shed in torrents on the Ilha dos Macacos, where the revolutionary general had buried the war-chest he had carried into the wilderness in his flight.

It was startling news to the juniors that an Indian spy had been lurking round their camp under cover of darkness while they slept.

Gaston scanned their faces and smiled again.

"Mais si! Zere are Indians," he said. "You do not zink zat you like to go back to ze quinta?"

"Wubbish!" answered Arthur Augustus.

"Allons! We go on," said Gaston. "But keep ze eye verree wide open. Ze arrow from ze bush is no respecter of ze person, n'est-ce-pas?"

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The juniors' hearts were beating rather fast as they resumed the march in the rising sunlight.

An Indian scout had located their camp, that was certain, and it might or might not mean hostilities. A numerous and well-armed party would probably have been safe in traversing any region of the sertao, but it was quite likely that a small party, with only three rifles among them, might tempt the savages to hostilities.

But they had not come so far to turn back at a danger that had been foreseen from the start. They tramped on steadily, with eyes and ears on the alert. To blind their trail was impossible. The gashes of the machetes, where it was necessary to hack a way, left signs that it did not need an Indian to pick up. A blind man could almost have traced it.

It was late in the morning that Gaston came to a sudden halt and signed to the juniors to stop. They halted, grasping their weapons, staring about them in momentary expectation of seeing dark bronze faces, scarred with circles cut in the skin in the Caraya manner, peering from the bush. They saw nothing, but as they listened a sound came to their ears—a peculiar low sound like the grunting of pigs.

That sound came nearer, accompanied by a rustling in the undergrowth.

The rustling, grunting, and squeaking sounded so exactly like a herd of swine rooting in the thicket that Tom Merry & Co. could not help thinking that that was what it actually was. But the faces of Gaston and Cucumber were set as grimly as if a whole tribe of Carayas were on the warpath close at hand.

"Bai Jove! What the thump is it?" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He tapped O Pepino on a bare black arm.

"Os porcos," said the black man, in answer to the unspoken question.

"That sounds as if it might mean pigs, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus.

"It does," said Tom.

"Well, pigs are not feafully alarmin' animals," said Arthur Augustus. "Pigs are not goin' to wowwy us, I suppose."

"Wild pigs may be dangerous," said Tom.

"Pigs are rasher than other animals," remarked Monty Lowther. But his comrades, listening intently to the sounds of the approaching herd, did not even perceive that this was a pun.

Gaston made them a sign to be silent.

"Ze peccaries!" he whispered.

"Peccaries!" repeated Tom, also in a whisper.

He had heard of the peccaries, the wild pigs of the Brazilian forests. Small as they were, they were indescribably fierce, and absolutely without fear. The St. Jim's party were passing close to a herd of peccaries—probably not more than twenty yards of jungle and forest separated them. They could see nothing of the animals, but they could hear.

"If zey scent us—" muttered Gaston.

It was difficult for the schoolboys to feel in danger from pigs, but it was plain that Gaston Moutarde was deeply uneasy. But what wind there was in the forest was in their favour. They were windward of the peccaries, and the animals, keen as their scent was, did not scent them. Gaston, after listening for a long, anxious minute, made a sign to move on.

"Allons!" he whispered. "Make no sound. If ze peccary he see us, it is to climb ze tree—zere is no ozzer vay. Ze silencio!"

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The St. Jim's party trod on quietly. Behind them they could hear the grunting and rustling of the peccaries, and the sounds seemed to be following them. No doubt the wild pigs, in their search for fallen nuts, were taking the same direction. If they had seen or scented the party they would have come on with a rush, and attacked with the unreasoning ferocity that was their nature. Quietly, but as swiftly as the undergrowth allowed, the juniors trod on after the trader, and the grunting and rustling died away behind them.

STRANGE ALLIES!

O PEPINO'S brawny black arm suddenly rose and swept through the air, and the sharp machete in his hand flew into the bush.

Tom Merry & Co. halted, startled by the sudden action, and wondering for a second what it meant.

Then they knew, as a loud and terrible yell sounded in their ears, and a wild figure rolled out of the bush, breaking through a mass of lianas almost at their feet.

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

In startled horror the juniors gazed at the Indian. An arrow was still grasped in the dark bronze hand; the bow had fallen in the bush as the machete struck. The dark face, strangely marked with cut circles that looked like another pair of eyes, was upturned, set in a glare of ferocity.

They could hardly realise that the savage was dead, but it was a dead man that lay at their feet, his skull split by the sharp edge of the machete.

"Bom!" breathed Gaston Moutarde.

O Pepino grinned.

"Morto!" he said, as he dragged back his hatchet and wiped it on the lianas; and he grinned cheerfully at the juniors, with a flash of white teeth.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus faintly.

The juniors did not need telling that the watchful negro had acted only in time. The arrow that was clutched in the bronze hand had been fitted to a bow, and it would have transfixed one of the party had not O Pepino spotted the Indian in his ambush. But that tragic incident gave the schoolboys a shock, all the same.

To O Pepino and the French trader it was an incident of the forest, as little to be regarded as the crushing of a mosquito, or stamping on the head of a snake. But Tom Merry & Co. were not used yet to the ways of the sertao.

"Come on!" muttered Blake, with a shiver.

Gaston signed to them to stop.

"Zere are ozzers!" he said, in a low voice.

The juniors listened. Faint and stealthy sounds could be heard from the tangled forest.

Other Indians were round them, unseen, not so near at hand as the savage who had fallen under Cucumber's machete. But they were there, and they were closing in on the party.

"Oh crumba! Look!" breathed Manners.

From an opening of the forest, a dozen yards distant, a fierce dark face looked. Only for a moment was it in sight, but that moment was enough for Gaston Moutarde. The French trader fired on the instant, and a wild yell answered the shot as the Caraya went crashing down into the undergrowth.

From five or six directions the yell of the man who fell was answered by other savage cries. More than a dozen voices were calling.

Evidently the Indian scout who had discovered

the camp in the night had carried the news to his comrades, and the party were watched for in the forest.

The juniors drew together, grasping their weapons. Perhaps they realised at that moment, more clearly than before, the overwhelming perils into which the expedition was leading them. But they did not falter. It was plain that a fierce attack was coming, and they were ready to fight for their lives.

They had halted under the vast branches of a gigantic ceiba-tree. Gaston muttered a few words in Portuguese to O Pepino.

The black man ducked his woolly head, and in a moment disappeared into the forest.

Gaston pointed upwards to the mighty branches overhead.

"Zat you climb!" he muttered.

Tom Merry & Co. did not waste time asking questions; it was for Monsieur Moutarde to give orders. Tom slung his rifle over his shoulder and swung himself into the branches of the huge tree. His companions followed him fast.

Gaston was last off the ground. The French trader swung himself into the tree with the activity of a monkey. Vast masses of foliage swallowed the St. Jim's party.

"Oh ewikey!" came a sudden ejaculation.

"Gussy!" breathed Blake. For a moment he feared that Arthur Augustus was falling.

"My eyeglass!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"What?" hissed Blake.

"The beastly cord caught on a beastly twig and snapped!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "I shall have to go down for it!"

"You burbling cuckoo!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Stick where you are!" hooted Tom.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Blake grabbed hold of an aristocratic ear as Arthur Augustus was about to descend in search of the fallen monocle. Tom Merry got a grip on Gussy's neck. Between them they held him back.

"Ow!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Leggo my yah, you ass! Leggo my neck, you othah ass! Oh ewimbs!"

"You dunderhead!" hissed Blake.

"You burbling jabberwock!" gasped Tom Merry.

"I wepeat that I have dwopped my eyeglass!" howled Arthur Augustus. "I insist on goin' down for my eyeglass."

"Hold him till I get hold of his nose!" hissed Herries, scrambling along the branch.

"Weally, Howwies—"

"Allons! Zat you look out!" came Gaston's voice. "Zey come!"

There was a rustling and scrambling in the underwoods surrounding the giant ceiba. Through the interstices of the foliage the juniors glimpsed a bunch of coloured feathers stuck in black, matted hair.

At that sight even Arthur Augustus ceased to think of going down for his eyeglass. The wild Carayas had closed in, and a dozen savages were gathered under the immense branches of the ceiba.

The juniors packed close among the thick branches, twenty feet from the earth.

They expected whizzing arrows the next moment. It would not take the Indians long to guess that they had taken to the trees. But a hand-to-hand struggle against heavy odds had been eluded; though, as the Indians could climb like cats, the struggle was only postponed.

Guttural voices, speaking in a language of

which the juniors did not understand a single word, floated up through the foliage. Then there was a swaying as an Indian swung himself into the tree, evidently to search for the party that had vanished from the ground.

The foliage hid him from the eyes of the schoolboys above till suddenly a dark, matted head appeared through the leaves, and fierce black eyes roved round and glinted as they fell on white faces. A split second later Gaston's rifle-butt crashed on the matted head, and the Caraya, with a stifled howl, went crashing down, crashing from branch to branch till he fludded on the earth.

From below came a savage roar.

The juniors realised that there were at least twenty of their enemies gathered under the ceiba. In their midst lay the man who had crashed down from the tree, groaning faintly.

"We can hold the brutes off here," said Jack Blake, gripping his machete. "They won't find this an easy job."

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus.

There was a swaying and rustling in the lower branches. Gaston's voice came rapping:

"Zat you shoot!"

The French trader, sitting astride a bough, streamed bullets down, tearing and rending through the foliage. Tom Merry and Herries joined in at once with the other two rifles.

Wild yells answered from below. There was a thud of a falling body, followed by another heavy thud. Then a howling and scampering told that the Redskins were dropping back from the tree.

Whiz, whiz, whiz! came through the branches, and arrow after arrow tore through the ceiba. But the thick branches—some of them two or three feet in thickness—were a good defence. An arrow stuck, quivering, in the brim of Arthur Augustus' new hat.

"Oh ewikey!" said Arthur Augustus. He jerked it out and pitched it away. "This is gettin' wathah warm, you fellows! I wondah why old Cucumbah is not heah; old Cucumbah would be vewy useful now."

All the juniors wondered why O Pepino had disappeared into the forest instead of following them up the ceiba. His strong arm and sharp machete were needed when the attack came again.

But the Carayas seemed reluctant to climb in the face of bullets streaming down from the rifles. For a time the tree was thick with whizzing arrows. Then the shooting slackened, only an occasional arrow whistling up into the ceiba. Then it stopped.

"Are they going?" breathed Blake. It seemed too much to hope.

Gaston gave a low chuckle.

"Zey do not like ze bullet," he said. "But zey do not go! Zey wait and zey vatch."

"Then we're fairly treed!" said Tom.

"We wait also!" said Gaston.

It seemed to the St. Jim's fellows that they were utterly cornered. Several of the Indians had fallen, but there were at least a score of the war party under the vast branches of the ceiba. They could not get at the party above, and they had realised that their arrows were of little avail. But they had only to wait. No one could descend from the tree without being riddled by arrows or transfixed by the thrust of a spear. Indeed, it looked as if the Indians had only to wait till their enemies dropped like ripe fruit into their clutches.

"Ecoutez!" murmured Gaston. "Listen!"

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There was a sound of grunting, squealing, and crashing in the thickets, approaching the spot.

"The peccaries!" exclaimed Tom.

"C'est ca!" grinned Gaston. "O Pepino he come back, and ze peccary he come after O Pepino—and I zink zat ze Caraya he do not like ze peccary!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

He understood now why O Pepino had been sent into the forest.

The devoted black man had risked falling into the hands of the circling Indians; he had risked being torn in pieces by the sharp tusks of the peccaries. He had gone back the distance that had been covered since the herd had been left behind, and nothing was easier when he reached them than to excite the ferocious animals to attack.

Now he was returning—with the whole howling herd in fierce pursuit. And from the Indians below the ceiba came loud exclamations of alarm as they heard the approach of the savage herd.

"Oh, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "But—but old Cucumbah—he must be in feahful dangah fwom those bwutes, Mistah Mustard—"

"C'est ca!" agreed Gaston. "Zere is verree great danger."

The juniors' hearts beat faster as they listened.

The savage howling of the peccaries told how great was the danger of the black man who had deliberately provoked them into attack and pursuit. Their thoughts centred on O Pepino—they almost forgot the wild Carayas under the ceiba.

But of the Indians it was unnecessary to think further. The Carayas were already in flight. Hurried rustling and crashing in the direction opposite to that from which the herd came told that the savages of the sertao were going as fast as their brown legs could carry them. Under the ceiba lay three of the Indians—who would never stir again. But the rest were in full flight through the forest.

"Oh, look!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Through the openings of the foliage the juniors, looking down without fear of arrows now that the Carayas were gone, could see the earth alive with moving forms.

Bristly backs seemed innumerable. The grunting, squealing, and howling made a continuous din.

With it came a horrid sound of quarrelling and snapping tusks, and the shuddering juniors knew what was happening to the fallen Indians beneath the tree—torn to fragments by the tusks of the peccaries.

"But old Cucumbah!" almost groaned Arthur Augustus. "Old Cucumbah has saved us, but what has happened to him?" And he shouted at the top of his voice: "O Pepino! Cucumbah!"

"Meu patrao!" came a familiar voice.

"Bai Jove! Here he is!"

A grinning black face appeared through the foliage.

Where Cucumbah appeared from so suddenly the juniors hardly knew, but they guessed that he had climbed another tree to escape the peccaries and clambered from branch to branch to reach them.

"Good man!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! I am feahfully glad to see you again, Cucumbah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Bom!" said O Pepino.

"They're going!" exclaimed Blake.

He pointed downward.

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The ocean of bristly backs was in motion below. Grunting, squealing, howling, many of them with blood dripping from their tusks, the whole herd of peccaries trampled off in the forest in the direction taken by the fleeing Carayas.

Gaston chuckled.

"I zink zat ze Carayas vill not stop," he said. "If ze peccaries come up viz zem, zey must take to ze trees—zere is no ozzer vay. Ze peccary he is verree fierce, and he is verree obstinate. But zey are gone. I zink zat we go down, and we go anozzer vay, isn't it?"

And when the wild howling and squealing died



The figure in front of Arthur Augustus clamped its party round

away in the forest, the St. Jim's party descended from the ceiba. Arthur Augustus, fortunately, was able to find his eyeglass, and then the party moved off, striking in a new direction—equally glad to be clear of the Carayas and of the peccaries.

TRACKED THROUGH THE SWAMP!

"ROTTER!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

It was the following day.

The shadowy forest had been left behind. Under the blazing sun the St. Jim's party were crossing a wide swamp.

Far away on their right they could see a glim-

mer of the waters of the Rio Preto. From the river bank for long miles the swamp extended—an ocean of fetid mud and slime, in which, here and there, grew clumps of straggling bush.

It had been hot in the forest, under thick branches that shut off the direct rays of the sun. It was hotter in the swamp, unshaded from the glare. And the going, which had been hard in the forest, was harder in the swamp, where the mud yielded to every step and the juniors sometimes sank to the knee. And the scents that were stirred up where they trod bore not the slightest resemblance to the roses of June!



rifle to his shoulder, and aimed it at the St. Jim's
the camp-fire.

"Rotten, and no mistake!" agreed Tom Merry. "Howevah, it's all in the day's work, deah boy! But, weally, I wish that a Brazilian swamp was not quite so smelly."

"Beastly!" sighed Blake.

"Putrid!" said Herries.

"The Brazilians ought to be a very sensible nation," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! How do you make that out, Lowthah?"

"I mean they have a lot of scents in Brazil!" explained Monty.

"Wats!"

Gaston Moutarde tramped ahead, guiding the juniors. Every now and then he tested the way

with a long cane. Progress was slow. Once already one of the party had slipped into deep slime up to the shoulders, and had had to be dragged out by his comrades.

Now the juniors were treading in the tracks of the French trader, like the page in those of Good King Wenceslas. Where Gaston trod, they trod with safety. Strung out in file, they panted and perspired after their leader.

Far ahead was a spot of shade, where trees grew on a patch of firm land. As the sun rose higher and higher, the juniors were anxious to reach that spot of shade.

But they could only proceed at a walking pace—almost crawling. They had struck rather a bad patch on the journey to the Ilha dos Macacos. However, they were keeping clear of the Carayas, which was one comfort. But the sun and the flies and the smell seemed rather worse than the Carayas.

Miles of fetid swamp had passed under their feet. They were splashed with foul mud from head to foot. Even Arthur Augustus had abandoned hope of keeping clean.

At intervals, the juniors noticed, Gaston stopped and lifted his field-glasses to his eyes, scanning the swampy expanse they had traversed.

Looking back, the juniors could see nothing but the dark line of the forest they had felt many weary miles behind.

If Gaston saw anything else, he did not speak of it. After each backward survey, he tramped on again.

Now he halted again and stood for several long minutes, with the field-glasses focused on the weary waste behind the party. Tom Merry & Co. came to a halt to wait for him.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus, when several minutes had passed, and the French trader still remained motionless. "I wathah think I will take a west, as we seem to be stoppin' here. Sit down on this log, you fellows."

Arthur Augustus made a step towards a huge log, half-submerged in slime, a few feet from the track through the swamp.

"Good egg!" agreed Blake, and he followed him.

O Pepino, who was bringing up the rear, shot forward, splashing mud right and left, and grabbed the swell of St. Jim's by the arm.

"Nao! Nao!" he exclaimed.

Arthur Augustus blinked at him.

"My deah chap, why shouldn't we sit down and take a west, while we are at a halt?" he asked. "Oh ewikey! I keep on forgettin'—Tom Mewwy, can you put it in Portuguese?"

"Porque nao?" asked Tom, meaning "Why not?"

O Pepino pointed to the log.

"Um cayman!" he said.

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"An alligator!" howled Blake.

He jumped back in a hurry.

The log lay perfectly still in the slime; the alligator was probably asleep in the burning heat of the day. Tom Merry & Co. eyed it uneasily. All the party were fatigued, but no member of it wanted to sit on that log now that Cucumber had explained that it was a cayman!

Gaston snapped the glasses shut.

"Allons!" he said. "You put ze best foot before ze ozzar, isn't it?"

The French trader tramped on. Tom Merry & Co. splashed on in the mud after him.

The sun was approaching the zenith and the heat was almost intolerable. But there was no rest for the St. Jim's adventurers; hot as it was, and growing hotter and hotter, they had to keep on.

It was the first time that they had carried on during the heat of noon, and they knew that Gaston must have some powerful reason for cutting out the usual midday rest.

Wearied to the bone, half-choked by the fetid odours of the swamp, they trailed on in the footsteps of Monsieur Moutarde, contriving somehow to keep pace with their leader.

They drew nearer and nearer to the patch of trees that loomed against the burning sky ahead. It seemed to them that they would never reach that spot of welcome shade. Danger or no danger, they hoped that Gaston was going to call a halt when the swamp-island was reached. It did not seem possible to drag their weary limbs farther.

"Some tree!" remarked Manners, with a nod towards a gigantic tree that soared over the lower growths in the island-swamp. He made a movement to take out his camera, but desisted. He was too tired and hot even to take a photograph!

It was a gigantic fig-tree, that looked to the juniors almost as large as a cathedral. A party a hundred times as numerous could have found shelter under its vast branches. The juniors had seen many enormous trees since they had arrived in Brazil, but this was the biggest ever. Even the great ceiba which had barred the flooded Preto was a sapling compared with it.

It was sheer joy to the juniors to step at last under that immense shade, out of the baking glare of the sun.

Gaston looked at them with a smile.

"Zat you are tired?" he asked.

"Just a little, sir," admitted Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! But we can keep on if necessary, Mistah Mustard," said Arthur Augustus valiantly.

He tottered as he spoke and leaned against the vast trunk of the wild fig-tree.

Gaston grinned.

"Heureusement, it is not necessary," he answered. "Ve stop here and take ze good long rest till ve are disturb."

The juniors did not inquire what disturbance he expected. They threw themselves down to rest in the shade.

Rifles and packs and machetes were dropped to the ground. Just then Tom Merry & Co. wanted nothing but to lie down and keep still while the ache of fatigue faded out of their limbs and strength revived.

Cucumber came from one to another with a gourd of tepid water. Then O Pepino laid down to rest.

Gaston stood for some minutes, surveying the sun-scorched swamp through his field-glasses. He closed them, with a grim smile on his face, and lay down, like the others.

If he had spotted an enemy in the far distance there was plenty of time for resting. No one was visible to the naked eye, and the passage of the swamp was slow. If there were pursuers on the trail it was likely to be some hours, at least, before they reached the swamp-island. Meanwhile, the party slept at peace under the shade of the gigantic fig-tree.

Tom Merry's eyes shut and did not open

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till he felt a shake, and then he awakened and saw Gaston bending over him.

"Zat you wake," said Monsieur Moutarde.

"It is to eat."

Tom sat up and rubbed his eyes. The sun was red over the far-distant mountains in the west; he knew that he must have slept several hours. The fiercest heat of the day was over. Gaston shook one after another of the juniors and they awakened in turn.

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom suddenly.

His eyes turned to the swamp they had crossed. Far away, but clear to his sight, were a number of moving figures.

They had, at the distance, an odd resemblance to huge mushrooms. But they were in motion, and he knew what they were—big grass hats on the heads of men. Far away as they were, he could see that they were not Indians.

He gave Monsieur Moutarde a startled look.

"The enemy!" he exclaimed.

Gaston nodded, and grinned.

"C'est ca!" he agreed. "Ze enemy! Zey come!"

"Rabeira?" exclaimed Blake.

"I zink so, mon petit."

Blake whistled.

"They've picked up our track," he said.

"That was easy enough," said Tom. "No good trying to hide your track in a place like this. Are we pushing on, sir?"

"Non! We eat!" said Gaston.

And the party sat under the shady fig-tree and ate iguana steaks, washed down by tepid water, and while they ate their eyes were on that file of enemies, winding through the swamp, drawing nearer and nearer with every passing moment.

IN AMBUSH!

TOM MERRY & CO. rose to their feet after the meal was over and waited for orders from Gaston. They were rested and refreshed, and ready to start on the tramp through the swamp farther on. But the French trader gave no sign to recommence the journey.

He signed to the juniors to keep in cover of the great trunk of the fig-tree—ample cover for many times their number. Keeping himself in cover of a bush near at hand, he watched the banda of outcast ruffians trailing through the swamp, all of them now clearly visible to the naked eye.

The juniors expected the order to march, and to march swiftly. But it did not seem to be Gaston's intention to go on. The grim smile on his tanned face rather puzzled the juniors. Gaston looked as if he were rather pleased than otherwise by the sight of Joao Rabeira and his gang of bandits.

"Mais si! Zat is Rabeira! I see him now!" said Monsieur Moutarde. "I zink zat he stop ze first bullet! Oui, oui, je le crois bien!" He grinned round at the juniors. "I zink zat zose rascals zey are in vat you call, in your language, one verree queer street."

"We're waiting here for them?" asked Tom.

"Zat is so!" Gaston chuckled. "Voyez mes enfants! We are now verree near to the Ilha dos Macacos, and zat villain, Rabeira, he have join his banda it is long ago. He lead zem to look for us in ze forest, and zey pick up ze trail and follow on. Comprenez? Zey track us through ze swamp. But while zat we see zem,

zey do not see us. Zey do not know zat we stop and wait."

And Gaston chuckled again.

"An ambush!" said Tom.

He understood now.

"Bai Jove!"

"Zat Rabeira, he is not ze only yun zat can lay ze ambush!" said Gaston, grinning. "I also can lay him, isn't it? And I zink zat zose ruscals will not all valk away vunce more viz zemselves! Pour cela, non!"

"By gum!" said Blake, "We've got them in a cleft stick! Once they're in easy rifle range we—"

"What do you zink?" grinned Gaston. "If zey come at ze run zey also tumble in ze swamp. And if zey go slow I pick zem off, yun by yun, like ze little bird on ze tree! Allons! I zink zat I, Gaston Montarde, can lay ze ambush as well as Joao Rabeira, isn't it?"

The juniors looked at Monsieur Montarde and at one another. They realized now that Gaston had planned this ever since his field-glasses had picked up the pursuit, early in the morning.

Rabeira was following their trail through the swamp, no doubt taking it for granted that they were keeping on their way, and were far ahead. There was no sign that they had halted, so long as they kept in cover. The bandit would not know that they had turned at bay till the ring of the rifles told him so. Then it would be too late.

The juniors' faces were grave. The ruthless warfare of the sertao was new to them—new and terrible.

In hand-to-hand conflict they had no chance against the banda of desperate ruffians, armed to the teeth. The trader, the negro, and seven schoolboys, with only three rifles among them, had little chance, if that numerous gang of desperadoes got to close quarters. They had known that they had to face fearful odds and overwhelming perils in the search for Gussy's brother in the wilds, and the disaster of the canoe had increased their peril tenfold. This was Gaston's astute scheme for dealing with the odds against them. He had picked time and place for the conflict that had to come, and Rabeira and his gang were walking into a death-trap.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"We've got to face it!" he said. "It's death to us all if they reach these trees alive."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Gaston gave another chuckle.

"Zat Rabeira, he follow ze trail," he said.

"He zink to come up viz us when zat ve camp for ze night, and zen—pouf!—one rush, and ze knife, and all is over! But I, Gaston Montarde, zink zat Rabeira he do not live long enough to see us camp to-night, isn't it? We have him where we want him, mes garçons—zis is vat you call tip of a top!"

Then, as he looked at the schoolboys, the trader's expression changed.

"Ah, ca!" he exclaimed. "Zis is no work for ze ecolier—ze schoolboy! Pour cela, non, non! Zat you remain behind zat tree, and do not look! You leave all zis to me!"

"Rot!" said Tom Merry. And he picked up his rifle.

Unpleasant as the prospect was to the mind of the English schoolboy, he certainly had no idea of leaving it to the South American trader.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus

D'Arcy. "We're all in this, Mistah Mustard! You had better give me that wifie, Hewwies."

"Life's sweet!" answered George Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies, you ass—"

"We're backing you up, Monsieur Montarde!" said Tom Merry. "We haven't come into the desert to be chicken-hearted. Give the word!"

Gaston shrugged his shoulders up to his ears.

"Allons!" he said. "Wait! You fire when zat I pull ze trigger—not before. Keep in ze cover, mes enfants."

Keeping in cover, the juniors watched the advancing bandits with fast-beating hearts.

They were near enough now for the dark, swarthy faces to be made out under the big, shady grass hats. There were nine of them in all.

Little as they liked the deadly work before them, the juniors could hardly feel pity for the savage gang trailing them down with the intention of perpetrating a merciless massacre. If Joao and his gang ran them to earth it was the end of the search for Lord Conway—the end of all things for them. Only the hungry urubus of the sertao would ever know their fate.

And, as if warned of what was coming, a black vulture appeared against the blue sky, a hideous blot on the blue, and it was followed by others, uruba after uruba winging across the swamp.

Gaston made a movement. The juniors saw him push his rifle through the bush in front of him, lying on the ground behind it. The moment of action was coming.

Over the rifle, that rested on a projecting root, the French trader watched the strung-out banda treading in file in the tracks left hours ago by the St. Jim's party.

They tramped and sweated under the burning

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sun, their eyes fixed on the shady trees ahead, probably longing to reach the shade, and little dreaming what it hid from their gaze.

Gaston's face over his rifle was hard as stone. At that moment the kind-hearted, good-tempered French trader was as merciless as Joao Rabeira himself.

He had sighted his rifle at three hundred yards, and he waited with grim patience for the enemy to walk into the range. Once within easy shooting, he had them at his mercy. They could neither advance nor retreat. Hurried movements meant destruction in the uncertain path winding through treacherous depths of slime, where a single false step might be fatal. Gaston had planned well—and he had the whip-hand of the enemy.

The silence of the swamp seemed heavy and oppressive to the juniors as they waited with throbbing hearts for the shot to ring out. When it came suddenly, it came as startling as a clap of thunder.

Crack!

Joao Rabeira, at the head of his banda, gave a sharp cry, pitched over, and lay on his face in the oozing mud.

THE WAY OF THE SERTAO!

JOAQ RABEIRA gave only that one sharp cry as he fell. He lay where he had fallen. From the rest of the banda came a wild roar of surprise and alarm.

They came to a sudden halt, staring towards the trees whence the shot had rung, and where they could discern no sign of an enemy.

Crack, crack, crack!

The juniors, through the bushes, watched spell-bound. Gaston fired twice, and Tom Merry once. Tom's bullet missed, soaring away over the swamp; but each of Gaston's struck down a swarthy bravo, sending him spinning into the ooze of the swamp.

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. His face was pale.

Loud yells of rage and alarm came from the bandits. They knew now that it was an ambush, but they knew too late.

Two of them rushed forward in a desperate attempt to get to close quarters. A couple started running back the way they had come. Two more stood as if transfixed, staring as if paralysed by the danger they had no means of escaping. In the open swamp there was no cover, and the treacherous bog was all round them—never had there been so fatal a trap as that into which Joao Rabeira had led his banda.

Gaston sighted his rifle, bringing it to bear on the two bandits who were rushing desperately towards the trees.

One of them, missing his footing, went into the swamp and sank there, the slime closing over his head. The other rushed on with a wild and desperate face. But he was not within a hundred yards of the trees when Gaston's rifle rang, and he pitched over, shot through the heart.

"Oh ewikey!" murmured Arthur Augustus faintly.

The other fellows were silent. This was the way of the sertao, and it was for life or death!

There was a sudden burst of rifle-fire from the swamp. The two bandits standing where Joao Rabeira had fallen, opened fire with their rifles, sending bullet after bullet crashing through the

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trees and bushes, and splintering on the trunk of the great fig-tree.

But they could see nothing of the St. Jim's party, and their fire was wildly at random. It was easy for the juniors to keep in cover. Then crack, crack, rang Gaston's rifle sharply, swiftly, and one after another the two bandits dropped their rifles and pitched over.

Tom Merry had dropped his rifle-butt. Herries had not used his rifle at all. But Gaston Moutarde needed no aid. In such an ambush, one good marksman had the life of every man in the open at his mercy. With a face like iron, the French trader sighted his rifle at the two men who were running, and who were by this time at a distance, though still within easy range.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ventured to stoop and tap Monsieur Moutarde on the shoulder as he was taking aim. Gaston stared up impatiently.

"Pway chuck it, Mistah Mustard, now that they are wunnin'!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

FOR NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"GUSSY'S WILD MAN!"

Telling of the final, full-of-thrills adventures of the chums of St. Jim's in the wilds of Brazil.

Order Your GEM Early!

"Zat is not ze way of ze sertao!" grunted Monsieur Moutarde. But he shrugged his shoulders and ceased to fire.

The two fleeing bandits scuttled on. No bullet from the trader's deadly rifle followed them, thanks to Arthur Augustus. But the juniors, watching their flight, saw one of them in his wild haste slip into the swamp and sink into the treacherous yielding slime. With pale faces, they watched his struggles as he strove to drag himself out, sinking deeper and deeper in the yielding ooze with every frantic effort. They could not hear him, but they could see that he yelled to his comrade for aid—unheeded. The other ran on without even turning his head, and the hapless wretch, struggling, sank out of sight.

Jack Blake wiped his forehead. "If this is the sertao, give me civilisation!" he murmured.

"Yaas, wathah!" "Bom!" O Pepino was grinning from ear to ear, showing every dazzling tooth in his woolly head. "Bom, bom! O inimigo do, Senhor Um Olho—morto! Bom!"

Gaston rose to his feet. "I zink," he remarked casually, "zat ve vill not have verree much more trouble viz Joao Rabeira and his banda! Isn't it? Marchons!"

The juniors were glad enough to march and get away from that fatal spot. But O Pepino gave a sudden shout, and pointed with a big black finger towards the fallen men that lay in the swamp. Alligators were crawling from the

(Continued on page 36.)

AS A PROTEST AGAINST THE DISMISSAL OF THEIR SCHOOLMISTRESS, CEDAR CREEK BECOMES—

The School on Strike!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

EARLY BIRDS!

BILLY COOK, the foreman of the Lawless Ranch, raised his bushy eyebrows in surprise. The ranchman was standing at the door of his cabin, with a steaming pannikin of coffee in one hand and a huge chunk of corn-cake in the other. The foreman was finishing his breakfast as the early sunrays came creeping up over the prairie.

Down the path from the ranch-house came a clatter of hoofs. And Billy Cook, lowering his pannikin from his lips, ejaculated:

"By gosh!"

Frank Richards and Bob Lawless came trotting down the trail, and they drew rein to greet the surprised ranchman.

"Top of the morning, Billy!" called out Bob cheerily.

"You ain't off to school yet?" asked Billy Cook.

"I guess so."

"Early birds, you know," said Frank Richards, with a smile.

"It's a good two hours before your time," said the ranchman.

"Nothing like being early, Billy, you know," said Bob Lawless. "We've got a new head-master coming to-day, too!"

"I heard about that," remarked the foreman. "I hear that Miss Meadows ain't any longer mistress at Cedar Creek."

"That's so."

"Fired by the trustees?" said Billy.

"Correct."

"It's an all-fired shame!" said Billy Cook emphatically. "Why, that Miss Meadows was the neatest little filly that ever stepped in the Thompson Valley!"

The chums of Cedar Creek laughed. Billy Cook's admiration was genuine, and well-founded. But they wondered how Miss Meadows would have liked to hear herself described as a "filly."

"It wasn't your popper's doing, Bob," went on Billy Cook. "I guess it was Mr. Grimm and old man Gunten that did the trick, and Mr. Lawless agin' it."

"That's the case," said Bob. "My father stood up for Miss Meadows at the school trustees' meeting, but he was outvoted."

"A goldarned shame!" said Billy Cook. "And if I was a younker at school, Bob, I guess I'd kick up a shindy."

Bob Lawless smiled.

"Perhaps there's going to be a shindy, Billy," he answered. "Perhaps that's why we're going



In a yelling crowd the Cedar Creek fellows rushed down to the gates, with the struggling schoolmaster carried bodily in their midst.

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to school two hours early this morning. Mum's the word, though."

And with a wave of the hand to the ranchman, the chums rode on towards the timber, leaving Billy Cook staring after them with a peculiar expression on his face.

In the dim light of early dawn Frank Richards and his Canadian cousin trotted on. They had left the ranch-house before anyone else in the building was astir, and had brought their breakfast—a fugal one—in their pockets, to eat as they rode.

The chums had their own plans for that day, which, for excellent reasons, they did not want to explain to Mr. Lawless just yet.

They munched cold beef and crackers as they trotted on in the fresh, clear air, and stopped at a spring for a draught of cold water to wash it down.

They rode on into the timber, where they found their chum Vere Beauclerc waiting for them on his black horse at the fork of the trail. The Cherub was also an early riser that morning.

"Hallo! Here we are again!" called out Bob cheerily. "Still feeling game to go on the war-path, Cherub?"

"You bet!" answered Beauclerc.

"We shall find a good many of the fellows there," said Bob, as the three chums rode on together. "I guess they're all game! It's up to us to see that Miss Meadows gets justice. She'd be as mad as a hornet, I guess, if she knew we were backing her up like this; but that doesn't alter the case. Old man Gunten isn't going to fire our schoolmistress at his own sweet will!"

"No fear!" said Frank Richards emphatically.

The trio rode at a gallop by the forest trail to Cedar Creek School. The glimmering creek and the school buildings came in sight at last. The sun was higher now, but the hour was still early, and at that hour, as a rule, there was no sign of life about Cedar Creek. On this special morning, however, there were a good many signs of life.

The school gates were not yet opened, but outside the gates seven or eight fellows were collected. They had arrived earlier than Frank Richards & Co., having a shorter distance to cover to the school. There was a shout as the three rode up and jumped off their horses.

"Hyer we are!" bellowed Eben Hacke.

"Waiting for you, old scouts!" grinned Chunky Todgers. "Here we are, as large as life and twice as natural, and ready to scalp old man Gunten if he shows up!"

"Hurrah!"

"And the noo 'cadmaster, if 'e shows up!" said Hopkins, the Cockney of Cedar Creek. "We won't 'ave 'im at no price, as sure as I'm 'Arold 'Opkins!"

"Gate not open yet?" said Frank Richards.

"We've got to get in."

"Black Sam isn't up yet," said Tom Lawrence.

"I guess that makes no difference," said Bob.

"I'll soon have the gate unbarred."

Bob Lawless rode his horse close to the palisade and stood on his saddle, and then drew himself up to the top of the wall. He swung himself over and dropped into the school enclosure. A minute more, and the bars of the gate were removed and the gate swung wide.

"Come in!" shouted Bob.

And the schoolboys crowded in, greatly excited. They had met at that early hour at Cedar Creek School for an extraordinary purpose, and what

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the outcome would be no one could guess. But Frank Richards & Co., at least, were determined; and so long as they were in the lead, the rest were pretty certain to follow.

CEDAR CREEK MEANS BUSINESS!

"GENTLEMEN and galoots—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Bob!"

Bob Lawless had mounted upon a bench in the big playground, and his comrades gathered round him.

In the distance the doors of Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd's cabins were seen to open. The two assistant masters of Cedar Creek, astounded by that early arrival of a crowd of schoolboys, were looking out to see what was the matter. But the crowd did not heed them; all attention was fixed on Bob Lawless.

"Gentlemen and galoots," continued Bob, "we've met here to stand up for our rights as free Canadian citizens—"

Loud cheers.

"And to back up Miss Meadows, our respected schoolmistress, who has been fired by the trustees—"

Groans for the trustees!

"Gentlemen, the matter's a simple one," went on Bob, waxing eloquent. "Miss Meadows is a lady we all respect. She turned Kern Gunten out of the school for gambling, and leading other fellows to gamble, after warning him more than once. Could she have done anything else?"

"Correct!"

"Old man Gunten is chairman of the school trustees, and he got his mad up and called a meeting. My popper voted for Miss Meadows; the other two, old man Gunten and his friend Grimm, outvoted him. They had the power to sack Miss Meadows, and they did it. Miss Meadows is gone."

"Shame!"

"To-day old man Gunten moseys in to introduce our new headmaster in Miss Meadows' place," continued Bob. "Now we're going to talk plain to old man Gunten."

"Hear, hear!"

"As for the new master, I don't know anything about him, except that his name's Peckover. But good, bad, or indifferent, he doesn't come here."

"Hurrah!"

"As he may be a good sort, we'll put it to him politely," said Bob. "But, in any case, he's not going to be allowed to take on Miss Meadows' job!"

"No fear!"

"We're standing up for Miss Meadows. And we're not going to give in till old man Gunten toes the line and lets Miss Meadows come back."

"Bravo!"

The roar of cheering woke every echo of Cedar Creek.

Black Sam, the stableman, was staring on from a distance, and Sally, the cook, was looking out of a window. Mr. Shepherd and Mr. Slimmey were advancing towards the excited group, with surprise in their faces.

Both the assistant masters sympathised with the schoolmistress, and Mr. Slimmey, indeed, had sent in his own resignation to the board. They were indignant, and they understood the indignation of the Cedar Creek fellows, but this outbreak was rather startling to them.

"What is all this?" broke in Mr. Slimmey. "Lawless, why are you here so early this morning?"

"No harm intended, Mr. Slimmey," said Bob. "We're on the warpath, that's all."

"What do you mean, Lawless?"

"We're not going to allow a new Head to take Miss Meadows' place, sir," said Frank Richards. "Bless my soul!"

Mr. Slimmey seemed too astonished to say more than that.

"My boys, you cannot act in a lawless manner," said Mr. Shepherd. "We can't think of allowin' it."

"Please understand us, sir," said Vere Beauclerc. "We intend no disrespect to you or to Mr. Slimmey, but we won't consent to Miss Meadows being sent away. The whole school is with us in this, though we're not all here."

"Please don't interfere, sir!" said Frank Richards. "We should be very sorry to have any dispute with you."

Mr. Shepherd coughed. Frank expressed it very civilly, but his meaning was clear. The two masters would not be allowed to interfere, in any case. Mr. Shepherd and Mr. Slimmey exchanged glances, and after a few moments' hesitation walked back to their cabins.

The lack of intervention by the assistant masters had an encouraging effect on the rebels. Those two gentlemen were evidently not to be feared in any way, and were not likely to offer much support to the new master when he arrived.

Meanwhile, several more fellows had arrived at Cedar Creek, and two of the girls—Molly Lawrence and Kate Dawson. The crowd numbered sixteen or seventeen now. The excitement was growing.

It was pretty certain that Mr. Peckover would put in an appearance well before the hour for lessons to commence, and the schoolboys were eager to see him, wondering a good deal what he was like.

There was a shout from the fellows near the gate as the wheels of a buggy were heard on the trail.

"Here they come!" yelled Tom Lawrence.

There was a rush to the gate. On the trail from Thompson a buggy appeared, with old man Gunten at the reins. Beside him sat a tall, thin man, with a very square jaw, and little keen eyes set very close together. The schoolboys could guess that this was Mr. Peckover, and they did not like his looks.

Behind him in the buggy sat a heavy-featured lad, with a grin on his face. That was Kern Gunten, old man Gunten's son, who had been turned out of the school for rascally conduct.

The buggy came up to the gates and stopped. Old man Gunten and Mr. Peckover alighted, and Kern Gunten was about to follow their example, when he saw the crowd and the looks they gave him. Immediately the grin died away from his face. He scented trouble, and he decided to remain in the buggy for the present.

Unheeding him, Mr. Gunten and the new master strode in at the gates.

A WARM RECEPTION!

OLD man Gunten glanced in surprise at the crowd of fellows inside the school enclosure.

"Come here, Richards!" he called out, recognising Frank.

Frank Richards approached.

"What are you boys doing here so early?" asked Mr. Gunten.

"Oh, we've come!" said Frank vaguely.

"I can see you've come!" snapped Mr. Gunten.

"As you are here you may hold my horse."

Frank did not move.

"These are some of your boys, Mr. Peckover," said the storekeeper, turning from Frank.

The new master nodded. The boys were all regarding him curiously, not at all favourably impressed by his tight jaw and the cold gleam in his eyes.

"Boys," said Mr. Gunten, "this is your new headmaster, Mr. Ephraim Peckover."

There was a dead silence. Mr. Peckover was looking at the schoolboys very curiously. He was sharper than the storekeeper, and he could see at once that something was wrong.

"I will show you your quarters here, Mr. Peckover," said the Swiss. "I think you will find them comfortable."

Mr. Gunten was a little puzzled himself by the vague atmosphere of unrest that surrounded him, but he led the new master towards the lumber schoolhouse.

To Mr. Gunten's surprise, Frank Richards, Bob Lawless, and Vere Beauclerc planted themselves before the porch of the schoolhouse. The other fellows gathered round them. Behind them the door had been opened by Black Sally, who was looking out with saucer-like eyes.

Bob Lawless held up his hand as the two men came up.

"Halt!" he said.

Mr. Peckover and old man Gunten halted.

"Lawless!" stuttered the storekeeper. "What does this mean?"

"It means halt!" answered Bob.

"Are you mad, boy?"

"I guess not."

"Stand aside at once!" exclaimed Mr. Peckover, apparently making up his mind to assume his new authority at once. "How dare you speak disrespectfully to Mr. Gunten?"

"We don't respect Mr. Gunten, you see," explained Bob.

Old man Gunten's fat face was suffused with rage, and his little eyes seemed to bulge from their podgy pockets as Bob spoke.

"Lawless!" he stuttered.

"Listen to me!" said Bob. "Mr. Peckover, we mean no disrespect to you personally, but we have decided that Cedar Creek School shall have no Head but Miss Meadows."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Miss Meadows has been fired by a dirty trick," said Bob undauntedly. "Old man Gunten knows all about it; he did it."

"Are you aware that Mr. Gunten is chairman of the board of trustees?" exclaimed Mr. Peckover.

"Yep!"

"You must be out of your senses, boy!"

"I guess not. We're standing by Miss Meadows."

"Boy," thundered Mr. Gunten, purple with wrath, "Miss Meadows is no longer headmistress of this school. She has been discharged. This gentleman is your new headmaster."

"Not at any price!"

"That is enough!" said Mr. Peckover, his thin lips coming together in a tight line. "I'm not the man to allow my authority to be disputed. I shall punish you severely, Lawless, for your impudence to Mr. Gunten."

"I should say so, by gosh!" gasped the enraged storekeeper. "You have full authority from the board, Mr. Peckover, to enforce discipline in this school."

"I shall not fail, sir."

Mr. Peckover had a stick under his arm. He let it slip down into his hand, and with a sudden movement he grasped Bob Lawless by the collar, taking the rancher's son by surprise, so quick and catlike was his movement. The next moment Bob was swung round, and the stick rose and fell across his shoulders with sounding whacks.

Bob roared.

"Let go! By gum, let go, or it will be the worse for you!" he yelled.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Back up!" shouted Frank Richards.

He rushed to his chum's aid at once. Mr. Peckover had certainly not expected that. Frank grasped his right arm, and dragged it down so that the stick could not be used. At the same moment Vere Beaulere grasped the new master's other arm. Mr. Peckover struggled furiously in their grip.

"Release me!" he thundered. "How dare you!"

But instead of releasing him the schoolboys tightened their grip, and Bob Lawless grasped him, too.

Old man Gunten stood rooted to the ground, staring as if he could not quite believe the evidence of his eyesight. It seemed like a horrid dream to him as Mr. Peckover was whirled off his feet, his stick torn away, and the new headmaster was sent spinning back into the playground. There he collapsed, measuring his length on the ground.

Then Mr. Gunten seemed to recover his senses, and he made a spring towards the schoolboys. In an instant half a dozen pairs of hands were laid on the fat storekeeper, and he went spinning after the new master.

Crash!

He landed on his back, with all the breath knocked out of his body. Side by side the new headmaster and the trustee lay sprawling and gasping, and from the schoolboys round the porch came a breathless cheer:

"Hurrah!"

NOTHING DOING!

MR. GUNTEN sat up. He blinked like an owl at Frank Richards & Co. as he sat in the dust and gasped. The fat storekeeper was so surprised that he seemed hardly to know what had happened yet.

He staggered up at last, however, with bulging eyes and flaming face. He realised that it was no horrid nightmare, but plain and sober fact, that he, great man as he was, had been collared and treated as if he were of no more account than any hobo who tramped the trails of the Thompson Valley.

"By gosh!" he gasped. "You young scoundrels! Oh! Ah!"

Bob Lawless pointed to the gates.

"There's your way, Mr. Gunten," he said.

"Rascal!"

"Same to you, old scout, and many of them!" answered Bob cheerily. "Better keep your hands off, Mr. Peckover," he added, for the schoolmaster seemed to be about to spring at him. "You'll get hurt if you don't!"

Mr. Peckover panted.

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"The school seems to be in a state of mutiny, Mr. Gunten!" he said, between his teeth.

"By gosh, it seems so! The work of Miss Meadows, I reckon!" panted the storekeeper.

"That's a lie!" struck in Bob Lawless. "Miss Meadows knows nothing whatever about it. We're acting on our own because we won't see Miss Meadows fired by a dirty trick—your dirty trick, Mr. Gunten. You're a bad egg!"

"What?" spluttered the storekeeper.

"A bad egg," said Bob. "Miss Meadows turned your son out of the school for being a gambler and a rascal, and your precious new headmaster wouldn't let him come back if he did his duty, even if we let him. But we won't let him, Mr. Gunten!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Mr. Gunten. He blinked helplessly at the insurgents. After his experience at their hands he was not inclined to try violence again, enraged as he was.

It was only too plain that Frank Richards & Co. were prepared to send him sprawling once more if he attempted it.

The two men blinked at one another, evidently at a loss.

"As for you, Mr. Peckover," continued Bob, his eyes gleaming, "you're a bit too hefty with your stick, and it won't work here. You're no good, sir, or you wouldn't let young Gunten come back after Miss Meadows booted him out. You're not the real white article, and I guess it looks as if you've worked it with your pardner, old man Gunten, to annex Miss Meadows' job here, and that's a low-down trick!"

Mr. Peckover seemed on the point of choking. He made a stride towards the porch, but the grim looks of the schoolboys made him pause.

"Come on, if you like," said Vere Beaulere. "It will be the worse for you!"

"Boys," gasped Mr. Peckover, "I am your headmaster!"

"Nothing of the kind!"

"Bosh!"

It was a roar of repudiation from the Cedar Creek fellows, and it made it quite plain that they did not intend to acknowledge Ephraim Peckover as their headmaster.

The schoolmaster turned to Mr. Gunten.

"This mutiny must be quelled, sir," he said.

"I guess so!" gasped old man Gunten. "You're empowered to take any measures you choose; you have my authority."

"There are assistant masters here, I believe, and servants."

"Sure!"

"Call them, then, to our assistance, and these young rascals shall soon be reduced to order."

"Good!" said Mr. Gunten.

He gave the rebels of Cedar Creek a venomous look, and strode away to the two cabins occupied by the assistant masters. Mr. Slimmey and Mr. Shepherd were outside the cabins, looking on from a distance, and conversing in low tones.

They glanced rather grimly at the fat gentleman as he came puffing up. The two young men knew what he wanted, but they did not look as if Mr. Gunten would get what he wanted. Neither did Mr. Gunten address them in the most tactful way; he was too furious for that.

"What are you loafing here for?" he thundered as he came up.

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Slimmey, blinking over the gold rims of his glasses at the irate storekeeper.

"Can't you see what's going on?"

"Perfectly well, Mr. Gunten."

"Isn't it your duty to keep your confounded boys in order?" roared Mr. Gunten. "Lay hold of something—sticks or anything—and come and help!"

Mr. Shepherd eyed him calmly.

"Help restore order, do you mean?" he asked.

"Of course I do, you pesky jay!"

The Gentle Shepherd smiled.

"You appear to allow yourself a very great freedom of language, sir," he said quietly. "As it happens, Mr. Slimmey has sent in his resignation as a protest against Miss Meadows' unjust dismissal. I have decided, after consultation with him, to follow his example. We are not, therefore, under Mr. Peckover's orders, or under yours, Mr. Gunten."

"Confound you!" burst out Mr. Gunten. "I believe you're in league with those young scoundrels!"

The Gentle Shepherd made a step towards him.

"Moderate your language, please!" he said sharply, "or—"

"Or what?" roared the storekeeper.

"Or I will knock you down!" said Mr. Shepherd coolly.

"And so will I!" said Mr. Slimmey. "You cannot bully us, Mr. Gunten. You have caused this riot by your shabby treatment of Miss Meadows, and you can deal with it yourself. I leave Cedar Creek this day."

"And I go with you," said Mr. Shepherd. "Come on, Mr. Slimmey, let us pack and get away. We cannot remain while this is going on and countenance it, and certainly we cannot assist those who have dismissed our respected colleague."

Mr. Gunten, gasping with rage, raised his fat, clenched fist. The Gentle Shepherd looked him in the eyes and waited. But the fat fist dropped again and unclenched. Mr. Shepherd smiled slightly and went into his cabin.

"You're sacked!" roared Mr. Gunten. "Do you hear? Sacked! Fired! Get out!"

He received no answer from the masters, and he strode away with a purple face. Catching sight of Black Sam, who was staring at the crowd at the porch, he called to the negro.

"Come here, my man!"

Black Sam came up.

"Your help is wanted," said Mr. Gunten. "You know me, I suppose?"

"Me know Mass' Gunten," agreed Black Sam, showing his teeth in a grin.

"That gentleman, Mr. Peckover, is the new headmaster here. You are to assist him in dealing with those boys. Get a horse-whip."

Black Sam shook his head.

"Me 'bey Missy Meadows," he said. "Missy Meadows gib me orders. No take odds. If Missy Meadows no come back, me go."

Mr. Gunten trembled with rage. Even the black man of all work had raised his heel against him, and to be defied by a nigger was the last straw. His rage overflowed, and he raised his hand and struck at the negro's black face with all his force. His blow did not reach the mark, however. A black hand gripped his wrist so hard that the fat man gave a yell of agony, and Sam's face grinned at him.

"You white trash!" said Black Sam contemptuously. "Low white trash, Mass' Gunten. You vamoose!"

He swung the fat storekeeper round by his wrist and sent him spinning away. Mr. Gunten staggered several paces, gasping, and Black Sam

walked back to his own quarters. From him, it was clear, there was no assistance to be had.

Almost foaming by this time, Mr. Gunten returned to the new schoolmaster, who was waiting near the porch with a black brow.

"Well, sir?" snapped Mr. Peckover.

"The assistant masters refuse to help. They've resigned," choked Mr. Gunten. "Even the nigger is cheeky, by gosh!"

Mr. Peckover set his lips. What was to be done in the circumstances was a mystery he could not solve at present. His cold eyes were gleaming, and there was no doubt as to what he would have liked to do; but the power to do it was not in his hands.

The insurgent schoolboys had watched Mr. Gunten's progress with grinning faces, a good deal encouraged by his failure to obtain help.

Mr. Gunten turned to the boys at last.

"You will be punished for this!" he gasped.

"Come and punish us!" jeered Chunky Todgers.

"We're ready for you, you foreign trash!" roared Eben Hacke.

"Come on, Fatty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I order you to make way and allow your schoolmaster to enter the house!" spluttered Mr. Gunten.

"Rats!"

"Go and chop chips!"

The storekeeper clenched his hands.

"Do you know what will happen to you? If you persist in defying authority I shall call on the sheriff for assistance."

"Call, and be blown!" answered Bob Lawless.

"You will be turned out of the school, Lawless."

"Well, I'm not turned out yet," said Bob coolly, "and there'll be some trouble first, Mr. Gunten."

"That's enough from you, Mr. Gunten," said Frank Richards. "You'd better go, and take your new schoolmaster with you."

"Vamoose the ranch!" hooted Lawrence.

Chunky Todgers came out of the doorway with a cushion in his hand, and it whizzed through the air. There was a howl from Mr. Gunten as it caught him under his double chin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now light out!" shouted Chunky. "You'll get some more if you stay here, old man Gunten. You make us tired!"

"Vamoose!" came in a threatening roar.

Mr. Gunten and his companion hastily backed away. They did not want any more cushions, and a jeering roar followed them from the crowd at the porch.

"FIRED!"

IT was close upon school-time now, and more and more boys and girls were arriving at Cedar Creek. Most of them gathered round Frank Richards & Co. at the porch. It was easy to see upon which side in the dispute their sympathies lay. Even those who did not join in the revolt gave the rebels their moral support, as it were, and wished them well.

There was a buzz of excited talk, while Mr. Gunten and Mr. Peckover, at a distance, were consulting desperately as to what was to be done.

Outside the gates Kern Gunten still sat in the buggy, feeling thankful that he had had the sagacity to remain there, and not venture within the walls.

There was no question of classes that morning. Nobody went into the school-room. The unaccustomed holiday added to the general excitement, and perhaps to the general cheerfulness.

Frank Richards & Co. had laid it down as a law that no more lessons were to be done at Cedar Creek until Miss Meadows came back, and in that, at least, they had hearty and unanimous support.

While the buzz of discussion went on Mr. Shepherd and Mr. Slimmey were seen to leave their cabins together with bags in their hands. To stay there without interfering while the school went on strike was not feasible, and certainly they did not intend to make any attempt to get Mr. Gunten out of the difficulty he had landed himself in. It was his business and the new schoolmaster's, not theirs. Moreover, they were well aware that their interference would not have been tolerated by the insurgents.

Leaving their more bulky luggage to be sent for at a more convenient time, the two masters had packed their bags, and now they departed, Mr. Gunten scowling, and Frank Richards & Co. shouting a cordial good-bye.

"I guess this is a cinch!" remarked Bob Lawless. "What can the galoots do? This is where they come out at the little end of the horn!"

"How is it going to end?" murmured Molly Lawrence.

"It's going to end in Miss Meadows coming back, I reckon," said Bob confidently. "We're going to give old man Gunten our ultimatum—good word, that! Come on, you chaps!"

Frank Richards & Co. marched to the spot where Mr. Gunten and Mr. Peckover were standing talking in low tones. A cheering crowd followed them.

"Made up your mind yet, Mr. Gunten?" called out Bob.

The storekeeper scowled by way of reply.

"Is Miss Meadows coming back?" demanded Frank Richards.

Meet the Boy from Scotland Yard!

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5 OTHER GRAND YARNS AND OTHER FEATURES—ALL IN TO-DAY'S ISSUE OF

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"No!" roared the storekeeper. "Then the school's on strike till she does come," said Bob Lawless determinedly. "We won't have lessons, we won't allow lessons to be given, and we won't have your pesky new schoolmaster. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Gunten!"

The storekeeper clenched his podgy hands. "Enough of this!" he said, in a gasping voice. "For the last time, will you receive your new master and submit to his authority?"

"Nope!"

"Never!"

"No fear!"

There was no doubting the earnestness of that reply, which was yelled at Mr. Gunten by thirty voices.

"Then I shall leave Mr. Peckover here, and go at once for the sheriff!" said Mr. Gunten, in a choking voice.

"You can go for the sheriff, or for the Governor-General, if you like!" answered Bob. "But you won't leave Mr. Peckover here. We don't want him, and we won't have him—that's flat!"

"Mr. Peckover, kindly remain here till I return," said Mr. Gunten, taking no heed of Bob.

"Certainly, sir!" said Mr. Peckover. "You will lose no time?"

"Rely on me!"

Mr. Gunten walked away to the gates, where his son was waiting in the buggy. The new schoolmaster took a step towards Mr. Slimmey's cabin, with the intention of remaining there till old man Gunten returned with the necessary force to restore order.

But Bob Lawless meant business, and his followers meant it, too. At a sign from Bob the schoolboys made a rush and surrounded the new master. Mr. Peckover halted, his eyes glittering.

"Stand back!" he said, between his teeth.

"Collar him!"

"Fire him out!"

The angry man struck out fiercely on all sides as he was collared by the schoolboy strikers. Two or three of them yelled, but Mr. Peckover's blows were soon stopped as he was seized from every side. He was whirled over in the grasp of many hands, and was swept from the ground and carried bodily after Mr. Gunten.

In a yelling crowd the schoolboys rushed down to the gates, with Mr. Peckover struggling and wriggling in their midst. Mr. Gunten spun round from the gateway, his eyes almost starting from his head at the sight of what was happening.

Without heeding the storekeeper, Frank Richards & Co. rushed Mr. Peckover up to the buggy and tossed him bodily into it.

Kern Gunten gave a loud howl as the schoolmaster crashed upon him, and they disappeared into the bottom of the buggy together.

"By gosh!" stuttered Mr. Gunten dazedly.

Bob Lawless and Frank Richards caught him by the arms.

"Jump in!" rapped out Bob.

"What?"

"Jump in, or you will be chucked in! Sharp's the word!"

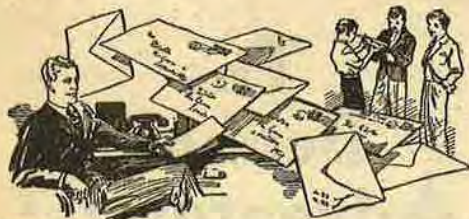
"I—I—I—"

"Oh, chuck him in!" roared Chunky Todgers.

"Let me go! I—I will get in!" gasped the storekeeper.

"Get a move on, then!"

The fat storekeeper scrambled wildly into the buggy. Frank Richards took the horse's head



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Let the Editor be your pal. Drop him a line to-day, addressing your letter to: The Editor, The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, Chums! The time is drawing near when that hardy old favourite the "Holiday Annual" makes its twenty-first welcome appearance. The "H.A." comes of age with its 1940 issue, and to mark the event an extra-special volume has been prepared. All the school stories—featuring our favourites of St. Jim's, the Greyfriars chums, and Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood—are "the tops," while the humorous articles and verses and the other ripping features are better than ever. I have had the pleasure of reading the 1940 volume, and you can take my word for it, it's super—232 pages of the finest fun and fiction! September 1st is the day it will be on sale, and the price is the same—five shillings. Make a note of the date—and drop a tactful hint to your parents!

"GUSSY'S WILD MAN!"

In this gripping yarn, which will be in your hands next Wednesday, the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. in the wilds of Brazil come to an end

and led him round into the trail, while Mr. Gunten and his son and the new schoolmaster sorted themselves out in the vehicle, gasping and furious.

"Off they go!" shouted Bob.

Frank gave the horse a light flick, and the animal, startled by the shouting, dashed away up the trail, the buggy rocking behind him. Mr. Gunten made a grasp at the reins and controlled the horse, but he did not stop. The fat gentleman was glad enough to get away from the excited school, and Mr. Peckover had no desire whatever to remain there by himself; he had too much regard for his skin.

A roar from the Cedar Creek crowd followed the buggy as it sped away up the trail to Thompson. The vehicle vanished from sight with a clatter of hoofs. Mr. Gunten was gone, and his new schoolmaster with him, and Cedar Creek was left to itself.

"Well," said Bob Lawless, with a deep breath, "we're in for it now, you chaps!"

"I guess so!" said Chunky Todgers. "Who cares?"

"In for a penny, in for a pound!" said Frank Richards. "Old man Gunten will bring the sheriff and his men. Are we going to give in?"

"No fear!"

"I guess we can't handle the sheriff as we did old man Gunten," said Tom Lawrence, with a whistle.

"I guess we're not giving in unless Miss Meadows comes back," said Bob Lawless.

"Hear, hear!"

—but not before the schoolboy explorers have experienced many more perilous and thrilling situations—especially Gussy! The search for Lord Conway in the wilderness proves fruitless, and so Gussy chooses to slip away on his own into the forest to look for his brother! As is only to be expected, he is soon lost! What happens when he bumps into the bandit again, and how he meets a wild man of the woods, makes thrilling reading. Don't miss it!

"NO SURRENDER!"

The revolt at Cedar Creek School is developing on serious but exciting lines. Serious as matters are becoming, however, one thing Frank Richards & Co. are decided upon, and that is there shall be no surrender until Miss Meadows has been reinstated as schoolmistress. But can they hold out against such strong opposition as Sheriff Henderson and his posse, whose aid old man Gunten enlists to subdue the rebels? The chums of Cedar Creek realise that it will be a hard fight, but they have no fears that the result will be satisfactory from their point of view!

"RIVAL TREASURE-SEEKERS!"

Having joined Daubeny & Co. on a wild trail of treasure-seeking, Jack Drake & Co. find things too warm to be comfortable—not only from the blazing sun, but warm in regard to danger from their rival treasure-seeker, Peg Slaney. The one-eyed seaman gets ahead of the Benbow juniors, and the latter find themselves under fire as they travel up the Rio Catalina!

Altogether next week's three stories are real thrillers—so make sure that you book your GEM early.

So-long, chums!

THE EDITOR.

"Cedar Creek is on strike, and the strike goes on till we get justice," continued Bob. "No time to lose. The sheriff will be along before the day's much older. Every fellow that isn't ready for a fight to a finish had better hop out while he's got a chance. We're going to bar the gate and hold the school against all comers."

"Bravo!"

"All the girls and all the kids had better go home," said Bob, in a business-like way. "There will be some hard knocks, most likely, and pretty faces mustn't get damaged. Every chap who stays after the gate is barred is in it to the finish, even if we wind up in the calaboose at Thompson!"

And Bob Lawless, like a good general, put his plans into execution at once. The little scholars and the girls departed, accompanied by the few who did not want to keep on to the end.

Frank Richards & Co. and a score of other choice spirits remained, and they barred the gate and prepared for defence.

Before long, they knew, outraged authority would be there, with force to back it up, and it would be a grim struggle.

How the affair would end no one could foresee; but upon one point Frank Richards & Co. were grimly determined—there was to be no surrender, and until their schoolmistress was reinstated the school would remain on strike.

Next Wednesday: "NO SURRENDER!"

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The Benbow Adventurers!

By Owen Conquest.

TOODLES, TOO!

"ALL ready, Mass' Jack!"
Tin Tacks, the coloured gentleman of Barbados, spoke in a whisper.

Jack Drake looked round cautiously.

The tropical sun was blazing down upon the wide waters of the Orinoco, on the little white town of Las Tablas, and on the forests beyond.

The river steamer that plied on the Orinoco between Trinidad and Bolivar was moored at Las Tablas. On the deck a crowd of Benbow juniors yawned under the wide awnings. The heat was heavy; under his mosquito-net, Mr. Packe, the master of the Fourth, was dozing.

Far down the river the Benbow was anchored, and Mr. Packe's little party of trippers were well on their way to Bolivar. During the stop at the riverside town of Las Tablas most of the fellows dozed or yawned; there really was nothing else to do in the tropical heat. They were anxious for sundown and the coolness of night.

"Nobody am looking now, Mass' Jack!" whispered Tin Tacks. "Me got Indian canoe—pay three dollar for him. S'pose you come now, all right! You trust ole Tin Tacks."

"Right-ho!" said Drake.

He made a sign to his chum, Dick Rodney.

At that moment Tuckey Toodles of the Fourth rolled out of a hammock under the awnings and joined his cabin-mates.

There was a grin on Tuckey's fat face.

As a matter of fact, he had had his eye upon Drake and Rodney for some time, and was well aware that there was something "on."

"You fellows going off the steamer?" he asked.

"Hush!"

"Well, are you going?" asked Toodles. "I'm not going to give you away. In fact, I'm coming with you, old fellow."

Jack Drake compressed his lips.

If the chums of the Benbow were to get off the

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steamer unseen by Mr. Packe, it was necessary to use the greatest caution. The interposition of Rupert de Vere Toodles bade fair to spoil all.

"You can't come, Toodles!" whispered Rodney.

"Rot!"

"You don't want to, kid," said Drake. "Look here, we're going across the river in a canoe—"

"All right! I'll come."

"You fat ass—"

"Look here, Drake—"

"We're going into danger!" muttered Drake.

"You fathead!" muttered Rodney. "We're warning you! Look here, Daubeny and Egan and Torrence have cleared off in a canoe with an Indian, and we're going to look for them."

"And I jolly well know where they're gone, then!" said Tuckey Toodles coolly. "I've heard 'em talking about that treasure document. They've gone to look for Peg Slaney's treasure!"

"Yes; but—"

"And you're going after them to have a paw in the treasure! I know!"

"Nothing of the kind. We're going to save their silly necks!"

Toodles winked again.

"Better get off, Mass' Jack!" whispered Tin Tacks. "I tink de steamer be starting again up de ribber soon. Den too late to go."

"Yes, yes! Tuckey, old man, don't play the goat now!" said Drake. "Keep you mouth shut, kid!"

"All right! I'm coming."

"I tell you—"

"You fat duffer—" hissed Rodney.

"I'm jolly well coming!" said Tuckey Toodles determinedly. "I'm not going to be left out when you're looking for a giddy treasure, I can tell you! I say, you'll want me, too—"

"What the thump should we want you for, fathead?"

"To look after you, you know," said Tuckey Toodles calmly. "In fact, I'll be chief of the expedition, you know. You fellows remember how I looked after you in Trinidad—"

"Fathead!"

"Well, I'm coming."

"You're not coming!" hissed Drake.

The two juniors followed Tin Tacks to the side.

The black man jumped into the Indian canoe that floated alongside. There was a stack of fruit in the canoe, and Tin Tacks had thrown in a length of canvas. The canoe and the fruit had been purchased from the Carib owner at a cheap rate by the black gentleman, and all was ready for the start—if Tuckey Toodles could only be disposed of. But that was not easy.

Tuckey followed the chums of the Fourth, still grinning. They jumped into the canoe, and, if

anyone on the steamer noticed the action, it looked as if they were only going down to examine the fruit stacked there. Tuckey Toodles coolly followed them.

It was impossible to kick him out without giving the alarm; and Drake was only too well aware of what Mr. Packe would do if he received warning of the intended escapade.

He suppressed his feelings as well as he could.

"Toodles, will you go back?"

"No, I won't!"

"We're going into danger—"

"Rats!"

"Me chuck him on to steamer, Mass' Jack?" asked Tin Tacks.

Tuckey gave a howl.

"Keep off, you black beast! I'll—"

"Quiet!" hissed Drake.

"I'm not going to be quiet if—"

"Shut up, I tell you! Come, if you like, and take your chance!" said Jack Drake savagely. "If you get knocked on the head it won't be much loss!"

"Rats!"

The juniors sat in the canoe, the steamer's side hiding them from Mr. Packe and the Beubow fellows.

Tin Tacks threw the canvas over them, and pushed off with a paddle.

Anyone looking from the steamer as the canoe glided away would probably have supposed that the canvas covered a stack of fruit from the sun's rays.

Tin Tacks paddled swiftly, and the canoe glided fast upon the wide waters of the Orinoco, heading across the great river.

Tuckey Toodles chuckled under the shelter of the canvas.

"This is prime!" he remarked. "I say, Drake, do you know where Daub & Co. are heading for?"

"Yes; the Rio Catalina, on the other side of the Orinoco!" growled Drake.

"Is the treasure there?"

"Fathead!"

"You can keep it dark, if you like, but I tell you I'm jolly well going to be on the scene when it's discovered!" said Tuckey Toodles. "I'm not going to be left out of the divvy! No jolly fear!"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Yah!" snorted Toodles.

Jack Drake looked back cautiously from under the canvas cover. Las Tablas was a blur on the bank now; the steamer was a spot against the white of the town. The schoolboy adventurers were safe from recapture by Mr. Packe, though what Mr. Packe would do when he missed them they could not even guess. But that was not the chief thought in their minds at present. Their business at present was to overtake Daubeny & Co., and save them from the fearful peril into which they had so recklessly run.

And as Las Tablas and the steamer faded out of view behind, Jack Drake watched the Orinoco ahead for a sign of Daubeny's canoe. Mile after mile of brown water vanished under the paddle wielded by the untiring arms of the Barbadian, and the sun was sinking deep behind the sierras in the west.

Round the canoe flowed the limitless waters of the Orinoco—lonely, vast, the current broken by floating logs and tree-trunks, and an occasional alligator that looked like a floating log. Far ahead were the trees on the northern bank, where the little stream of the Rio Catalina joined the great river—the point that Daubeny & Co. were heading for. As the dusk fell, Drake and

Rodney watched with deepening anxiety. And as they neared the bank there came through the thickening dusk a sharp, echoing sound, and they started. It was the sudden crack of a revolver!

A FIGHT FOR LIFE!

"I DON'T like the fellow's looks!" muttered Torrence uneasily.

Daubeny grunted.

"Oh, rot!"

"I tell you he looks—"

"Are you in a funk?" sneered Egan.

"No more funky than you are—not so much, I fancy, if it comes to that!" said Torrence scornfully. "But—"

"Shut up! The man understands English!" grunted Daubeny.

Torrence of the Shell held his peace, but his uneasiness did not abate. The Indian canoe, hollowed by fire out of a tree-trunk—a heavy and clumsy contrivance—floated under great overhanging branches by the side of the rolling Orinoco.

Daubeny & Co. were far from their school-fellows now; the vast Orinoco rolled between them and the steamer at Las Tablas.

They sat in the canoe which lurched to the current, clumsily obeying the paddle of the brawny Carib.

High banks, thick with vegetation, were washed by the brown waters. Great boughs hung over the stream, and black-faced monkeys grinned down at the canoe and chattered. Long streamers of Spanish moss hung suspended from the branches, and some of the trunks, massive as they were, were quite hidden by the network of lianas. It was impossible to look into the forest; trees behind trees and tangled underwoods shut off the view. All was dark and solemn and impenetrable.

Perhaps it was dawning upon Daubeny's mind that he had been rash and reckless in making this venture. The treasure clue was in his pocket, but unknown and unnumbered perils lay between him and the buried gold. Without counting the rivalry of Peg Slaney, the one-eyed seaman, there were innumerable dangers—poisonous swamps, poisonous serpents, wild Indians, and wild animals—and among the first of the dangers was the Indian whose canoe Daub had hired to cross the Orinoco.

Torrence was watching the man, with deep disquietude, as the clumsy log canoe floated in the deep shadow of the branches by the river. The Carib was a muscular man, with a heavy face and glinting, narrow black eyes. More than once his black eyes had turned to the Shell fellows with an expression that Torrence did not like.

"You've got the revolver, Daub?" he whispered, after a silence.

"Yes."

"Loaded?"

"Of course."

"Keep your eyes open for him—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, give us a rest!"

Torrence set his lips hard. Daubeny and Egan seemed to be thinking only of the treasure they were seeking—for which they had recklessly quitted the shelter of the steamer.

Daub called to the Indian:

"Close on the Rio Catalina yet?"

"No come yet, senhor."

He pointed with his paddle ahead of the canoe. Some distance ahead a small stream poured

into the Orinoco, so thickly shaded by great ceiba and cabbage-palm trees that the branches met over it in a leafy arch. The Indian was heading for the green arch, from beneath which a sluggish yellow stream flowed. A sickly odour of rotting vegetation was wafted to the juniors, and Torrence shivered, hot as it was.

"Yellow fever there!" he muttered.

"Dry up!"

The sun was sinking low, and shadows darkening on the Orinoco. From the deep forests on the banks came strange, echoing cries—the cries of wild beasts already on the prowl.

Daubeny & Co. watched eagerly as the canoe glided into the little tributary, finding little difficulty in fronting the sluggish current.

Under the arches of the trees, right across the little stream, the dusk was deeper. Forward, the shadowy stream was seen for a hundred yards or so, between heavy green banks, till it vanished in the shadows.

"The Rio Catalina?" Daub asked, looking at the Carib again.

The copperskin nodded.

Vernon Daubeny's eyes glistened.

"It's the first step towards the treasure!" he muttered. "Danger or no danger, I'm going on! I'm going back to the Benbow rich!"

"If we get back there at all!" grunted Torrence.

"Oh, don't croak!"

"Look at the Indian!" breathed Torrence.

"Your revolver, Daub!" Oh, heavens—"He broke off with a shriek.

The canoe was floating on the little stream now, and the broad Orinoco was behind the adventurers.

The Indian had taken his paddle from the water, and turned towards the juniors.

Without a word, without a warning, he made a sudden spring towards them, the paddle whirling aloft in his hand.

His murderous intention was only too clear.

He had brought the three juniors across the Orinoco, and turned into the little tributary, and there his obedience ceased. Out of the sight of any possible observer, the savage turned upon them.

But for Torrence's suspicious watchfulness, the Shell fellows would have been taken utterly by surprise.

As it was, the Indian was upon them almost before they could move.

Though it was Torrence who had been watchful, it was Daubeny who acted in time. He leaped up as the copperskin sprang on them, and, before the whirling paddle could descend, Daubeny dodged under it and butted the savage in the chest.

The Carib reeled back with a grunt.

Daub's action had been prompt and sudden—too sudden for the Indian, who had evidently expected to take the juniors entirely by surprise.

The ruffian reeled back, and the canoe rocked, and he lost his footing and fell heavily.

The fall of the heavy Indian into the bottom of the canoe set it rocking wildly, and there was a surge of water over the side.

The savage scrambled up again instantly, his black eyes glittering with ferocity. He had dropped the paddle, but his hand was clutching at the knife in his skin girdle.

"The pistol!" shrieked Torrence.

Egan did not speak or move; he sat where he was, frozen with horror.

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Fortunately for the schoolboy treasure-hunters, Daubeny was made of sterner stuff.

He groped in his pocket for the revolver he had brought from the steamer, and dragged it out as the Indian scrambled up.

His face was deadly white, but he was cool and he was determined. He knew that the fight was for life or death. To the savage Carib, the lives of the schoolboys were no more than the lives of the buzzing mosquitoes. He had brought them there to rob them, and to murder them was merely a step to robbery—a natural step to the savage of the Orinoco.

Crack!

The Carib was only a yard from Daubeny, knife in hand, when the revolver rang out.

The bullet struck the Indian in the shoulder, but he came on, and his full weight fell on Daubeny. But he did not stab. The brawny right arm had dropped useless, paralysed by the wound—the knife slipped from the nerveless hand and disappeared with a flash into the yellow water.

A savage hand tore at Daubeny's throat, two fierce black eyes blazed at him; he struck furiously at the Indian's face with the barrel of his revolver, and yelled to his comrades for help.

Torrence scrambled to his aid—Egan was still too terror-stricken to stir.

In the bottom of the burnt-oak log canoe a savage struggle raged, and but for the fact that the copperskin was wounded, it would have gone hard with Daubeny & Co.

"Look out!" shrieked Egan suddenly.

The wild rocking of the clumsy canoe capsize it suddenly. There was a rush of water inboard.

The next moment the four were struggling in the stream.

Fortunately, they were in the shallows, and the water rose only to their waists as they stood up. Daubeny & Co. plunged spluttering to the bank.

They scrambled upon a fallen trunk that lay half on the bank, and half in the water, catching hold of the wiry lianas to drag themselves to safety.

Panting and breathless, they sank down on the great trunk, which was seven or eight feet in thickness.

"Oh, gad!" groaned Egan. "Oh, gad! Where is he? Can you see him?"

"He's comin'!" breathed Torrence.

The Indian was scrambling on the end of the log. He stopped there, his black eyes blazing at the juniors. His right arm was useless; but with his left hand he tore a short bough from the trunk, and gripped it to use as a club.

Then he came creeping along the horizontal trunk, stealthy as a cat, his eyes fixed on the juniors.

"Shoot!" panted Torrence.

Daubeny levelled the revolver.

Click!

The hammer fell, but there was no report. The revolver was wet through its immersion in the stream.

The Indian came on, and Daubeny desperately clubbed his revolver. But he knew that it was futile—that the sweep of the heavy club in the Indian's brawny grasp would hurl him from the trunk, with a shattered skull.

"Back up!" he cried hoarsely.

Crack!

From the shadows came a sudden ringing report, and the Indian staggered back with a fearful cry. For a moment he staggered blindly

on the fallen trunk, and then slipped aside and crashed into the water.

Splash! There was a series of bubbles, and then something that did not move a limb floated away on the water like a log.

DRAKE'S RESOLVE!

"JACK DRAKE!" yelled Daubeny of the Shell.

In the excitement of the deadly struggle, neither the Shell fellows nor the Carib had seen a canoe that glided from the Orinoco into the sluggish stream under the forest branches. Jack Drake & Co. had arrived—only just in time.

Tin Tacks had laid in his paddle—a smoking rifle was in his hand now. It was the black man of Barbados who had fired the shot that had saved the life of the treasure-seekers.

He grinned at Daubeny over the smoking rifle.

"Saved!" whispered Egan huskily.

The canoe glided on close to the fallen trunk. Daubeny & Co. stood on the trunk looking down on the newcomers, as Tin Tacks brought the canoe to a stop alongside.

"You here, Drake?" muttered Daubeny.

"Lucky for you we came, I think," said Jack Drake.

"I—I asked you to come—I wanted you with us," said Daubeny. "I offered you a fair share of the treasure. I offer you the same now."

"We came to save your lives, if we could," said Drake. "The Indian turned on you, as we thought—"

"Yes. Did you shoot him, Tin Tacks?"

Tin Tacks nodded and grinned.

"Me pot him," he answered cheerfully. "Ole Tin Tacks gib him blazes, you bet. Now caymen get him."

He jerked a black thumb towards the middle of the stream. A hideous scaly head had risen into view and there was a snap of a pair of powerful jaws.

Daubeny shuddered.

"I—I—you've saved our lives, Tin Tacks. Drake, can we come in the canoe?"

"Certainly; your own's gone under," said Drake. "You're coming back to the steamer?"

Daubeny set his teeth.

"No!"

"Don't be an ass, Daub," muttered Torrence. "We've lost our canoe—we can't go on."

"I'll follow the bank on foot, then," said Daubeny. "I tell you I won't go back. We'll never have another chance. Do you think Packe is likely to let us get away another time?"

"No; but—"

"It's now or never—neck or nothing," said Daubeny. "I tell you if all the savages in South America were in the path, I'd go on. Drake, come on with me—we'll share out alike. Now you're here, keep on to the finish. You're booked for a row anyhow for leaving the steamer—may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Come on and help me find the treasure."

Jack Drake hesitated.

He glanced at Dick Rodney, but Rodney, too, seemed undecided now. The appeal of the adventure and the treasure was very strong.

And it was evident that Vernon Daubeny would not return, and to leave him stranded, on foot and alone in the forest, was impossible—so it seemed to Drake.

"I say, I'm going on," said Tuckey Toodles. "Don't be an ass, Drake, we're after the treasure."

We'll soon shut Mr. Packe up when we get back with our pockets full of gold."

"I'm not thinking of Mr. Packe," muttered Drake. "I'd come on with you, Daub—only—"

"Only what?" exclaimed Daubeny, impatiently.

"Only you bagged the treasure clue from Peg Slaney, and if anybody's got a right to the treasure, it's Slaney!"

"He's got the clue, too," said Daubeny. "It's a fair contest between us—and he stole the clue!"

"If you're so jolly particular, you needn't touch the treasure," said Egan cynically. Egan was recovering himself now.

Drake gave him a look of contempt.

"I shan't touch the treasure unless it's clear that I can touch it without robbing somebody else," he said. "Daub, I wish you'd do the sensible thing, and come back to the steamer."

"I won't!"

"What do you say, Rodney?" asked Drake. "We can't leave Daubeny here."

"Let's go on," said Dick Rodney. "The question of the treasure can be settled if we find it—which I doubt. Let's chance it, and go on, now we've come so far. We shall get into an awful row, anyhow, and we may as well make the most of it."

"Yes, rather," said Tuckey Toodles.

"What do you say, Tin Tacks?" asked Drake.

The black seaman grinned.

"Me foller Mass' Jack, whereber Mass' Jack go," he answered.

Drake made up his mind.

"We're in for it," he said. "Jump in, you fellows—lucky there's room for all. We're going on."

"Good!" exclaimed Daubeny.

The three Shell fellows embarked in the canoe and Tin Tacks pushed off from the tree-trunk.

"We go up-stream, Mass' Jack?" he asked.

"Straight up the Rio Catalina," said Daubeny.

"Dis de Rio Catalina. Right!"

"It's three days up the stream," said Daubeny. "It's written in Peg Slaney's treasure clue. Drake, old man, I'm jolly glad you're with me." He pressed Drake's arm. "Jolly glad, old chap."

Drake nodded with a smile. It was a wild adventure—a reckless adventure—but, somehow, Drake, who had tried to induce Daubeny to do the sensible thing, felt pleased that it was Daubeny who had induced him to do the reckless thing. Anyhow, the Benbow juniors were booked for a treasure-hunt, and they resolved to banish all considerations from their minds—for the present, at least.

On the silent stream hardly a sound broke the stillness save the rhythmic beat of Tin Tack's paddle.

The black seaman seemed tireless.

From the forest on either side of the stream came an occasional long-drawn howl.

"Jaguar!" said Tin Tacks at once.

From a high branch swinging fairly over the gliding canoe, a fierce, cat-like face looked down, and a pair of glittering eyes scintillated at the juniors.

But the canoe glided on before the jaguar could spring, if it had intended to spring.

Back on the Orinoco, there was still a gleam of departing day; but on the little tributary, shut in by branches, the darkness settled down blacker and blacker.

Tin Tacks ceased to paddle at last.

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"Are we going on to-morrow, Mass' Jack?" he asked.

"Yes, and the day after," smiled Drake.

"Golly! We camp to-night, den!"

"Where you think best, old chap."

"You know this stream, Tin Tacks?" asked Dick Rodney.

"You bet, Mass' Rodney. Me come up here once with Mass' Daubeny's father. Dat in de revolution; we hide from soldiers. Dat time Ponce Garcia gib Spanish paper to Mass' Sir George, dat paper which dat rogue Peg Slaney—him dey call Paquito—stole after. Me know him."

"You hear that, Drake?" said Daubeny. "I was quite certain the treasure clue was the paper Slaney stole from my father."

Drake did not answer that. He could not be sure of it, and he was well aware that in Daub's case the wish was father to the thought.

"We camp on island," continued Tin Tacks.

"Safe from jaguar on island, Mass' Jack."

"Right-ho! You're guide, Tin Tacks."

A few minutes later the canoe bumped into soft mud, and the juniors scrambled ashore on a woody island in the middle of the Rio Catalina.

AN ATTACK IN THE NIGHT!

A FLARE of ruddy flame danced against the blackness of the night.

It had not taken Tin Tacks long to get the camp-fire going. There was wood in abundance, and a great fire was soon roaring away, a dozen yards from the water, under a great ceiba-tree, that reared its branches in the midst of the little island.

"I say, I'm jolly hungry!" Tuckey Toodles

remarked in a plaintive tone. "I hope you haven't been ass enough to start on a journey like this without grub, you fellows!"

Drake shrugged his shoulders.

"We came after Daub," he said. "We expected to be back at Las Tablas to-night. You shouldn't have come, fatty."

"Look here—"

"We've got some grub," said Daubeny. "We filled our pockets with all the stuff we could get on the steamer. There's some potted stuff, and some dried fish, and plenty of rolls."

"Hand it out," said Tuckey Toodles eagerly.

"That little lot won't last us very long," remarked Rodney, when Daubeny & Co. had turned out their store of provisions.

Daubeny nodded.

"I know! We couldn't make proper preparations, having to get off in secret as we did. I reckoned we'd get some game in the forests—snare birds, perhaps, and then there's fruit—"

"I shall want square meals!" remarked Tuckey Toodles, with the air of a fellow stating a consideration that was far too important to be lightly overlooked.

"Shut up, Toodles!"

"Me get food to-morrow, Mass' Jack," said Tin Tacks. "Me know how catch iguana—and birds—and lots of tings. You no go short while old Tin Tacks with you, Mass' Jack."

"Good old Tin Tacks," said Drake, laughing. "I don't quite know where this expedition would be without you, Tin Tacks. You've got to be guide, bodyguard, and universal provider."

Tin Tacks grinned.

"You put your money on ole Tin Tacks," he said reassuringly.

The juniors ate with a good appetite, though Tuckey Toodles was not suffered to make too deep an inroad on the provisions. Had Tuckey been given his head, little enough would have remained for the morning.

Hot as the day and the evening had been, a chill crept over the forest and the river with the night, and the juniors were glad enough of the camp-fire. Tin Tacks banked up branches and logs to feed the fire through the night.

"Keep him goin', Mass' Jack," he said. "Keep off jaguar, and python, and odder snakes. Golly! Plenty bad snake along Orinoco. Heap poisonous, I guess. Hallo, what's dat?"

Tin Tacks grabbed up his rifle, and spun suddenly from the fire. His eyes glittered at the thickets outside the radius of the firelight.

"I heard nothing, Tin Tacks—"

"Me tink—look!"

The fire flared up, and a ruddy light fell on a mass of prickly bush, a few yards from the camp. In the ruddy light, a face looked from the bushes—a face the juniors knew. It was a dark, sun-browned, evil face, with a single eye, that squinted malevolently.

"Peg Slaney!" shouted Rodney.

The face vanished the next moment.

The one-eyed sailorman, their rival in the quest of the Orinoco treasure, was on the island—evidently on the same journey.

"Look out!" shouted Tin Tacks. "You take cover, Mass' Jack—lie low—t'row yourself down—him shoot!"

Crack!

"Great Scott!" muttered Rodney. "He means trouble, Drake."

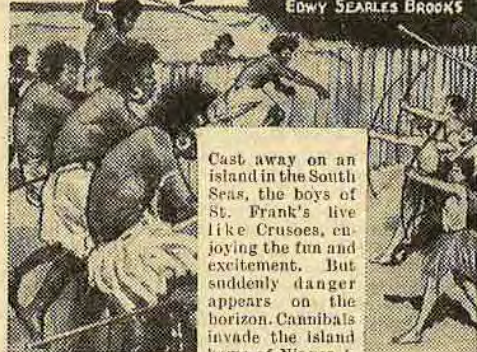
Crack!

Another shot came from the darkness, striking

(Continued on page 35.)

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R. Williams, Mfantsipur College, Cape Coast, Gold Coast, West Africa; age 18; stamps and topics of general interest; any part of the world.

Miss J. Calver, 22, Inkerman Road, Kentish Town, London, N.W.5; girl correspondents, age 16; any topic; anywhere; all letters answered.

Miss D. Henderson, 31, Conway Street, Hr. Broughton, Salford 7, Lancs; girl correspondents, age 18-23; dancing, cycling, hiking, swimming, reading; British Isles, U.S.A., Switzerland, S. America; all letters answered.

N. Biden, 31, Barkly Street, Uitenhage, South Africa; stamps; British Empire except England, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

H. Spinney, P.O. Box 263, Capetown, South Africa; stamps; British possessions.

G. Manhart, 32, Lorraine Mansions, Widdowham Road, Holloway, London, N.7; pen pal, age 12-15, in hospital; anywhere.

R. Blythe, 81, Alsen Road, Holloway, London, N.7, wants old copies of the "Nelson Lee Library," "Magnet" (before 1936), and GEM (before 1935).

Miss L. Richards, 39, Kelawel Road, Penang, Straits Settlements; age 18 upwards; stamps, snaps, matchbox labels, postcards, films, and general topics; anywhere except Malaya.

A. Greer, 143, Ross Road, South Norwood, London, S.E.25; age 11-12; stamps, cricket, swimming; Hawaii, Egypt, Canada, and Malaya; all letters answered promptly.

B. Farrell, Lord Clyde, 10, Lee Street, Haggerston, London, E.8; age 15-17; all topics; China, India, Hawaiian Islands and Egypt.

L. Furber, 60, Rice Lane, Egremont, Wallasey, Cheshire, wants members, age 10-14, for a club; write for particulars, enclosing return postage.

THE BENBOW ADVENTURERS!

(Continued from page 34.)

the ground within a foot of Drake, as he lay in cover in the grass.

The third shot was from Tin Tacks' rifle; he was firing at the flash of the enemy's shot.

There was a loud yell.

Tin Tacks thrust the rifle into Drake's hands.

"Where are you going?" panted Drake, as the black sailorman drew a knife from his belt.

"Me go look for Paquito!" he said, showing his white teeth.

Tin Tacks did not wait for Drake to speak—he vanished into the shadows.

Drake shuddered.

He realised that he was in the land of merciless warfare now. By leaving the Benbow party, the juniors had left the last trace of civilisation behind them. In the forests of Venezuela, life depended on quickness with the trigger and deftness with the knife. If Tin Tacks came within striking distance of Peg Slaney—Drake shuddered again, and hoped that the one-eyed ruffian had made good his retreat.

The sound of Slaney's fierce cursing had died away in the night.

From the silence of the stream came a sudden sound of dashing paddles.

"He's gone!" whispered Rodney. "He had a canoe—I'm glad he's got away."

A few minutes later Tin Tacks came back into the light of the fire. There was a discontented scowl upon his black face.

"Him got canoe, Mass' Jack," he said. "Him clear off. Me get him nodder day, you bet."

"Perhaps we shan't see him again," said Drake.

"We shall see him," said Daubeny quietly. "He's after the treasure—on the same journey as ourselves. And—we want to see him. We don't want him to get to the treasure first."

The strokes of the paddle died away in the night; the one-eyed ruffian was gone up-stream, and he had vanished.

But a careful watch was kept in the camp on the island that night.

All were glad enough when the light of dawn filtered through the heavy branches overhead, and the sun of a new day flushed up over the forests of the Orinoco.

Next Week: "RIVAL TREASURE-SEEKERS!"

TRAIL OF PERIL!

(Continued from page 22.)

slime, and from overhead the black vultures were swooping. Cucumber's black finger pointed at Joao Rabeira.

The "capitao" of the savage crew had not stirred since he had fallen. But as a hideous snout came nosing from the slime, he stirred, and the juniors, looking at him, realised that their enemy was only wounded, and that he had remained still only to escape another shot. Now he was on his feet, limping away to escape the jaws of the alligator.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Gaston.

His rifle flew to his shoulder. Arthur Augustus pushed up the barrel as he pulled the trigger.

The bullet flew yards over the head of the bandit.

"Vat do you?" exclaimed Monsieur Montarde angrily, glaying at the swell of St. Jim's.

"The bwite is wounded—let him go!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "For goodness' sake draw a line, Mistah Mustard."

"Zat is vat you call in English ze bosh and ze piffle!" grunted Monsieur Montarde. But he dropped his rifle-butt and shrugged his shoulders

up to his ears. "Allons! Let him take ze chance. Marchons!"

And the St. Jim's party marched.

TOM MERRY & CO. camped that night under forest branches on the bank of the Rio Preto. The swamp and its horrors were left far behind. The St. Jim's adventurers were very near their destination now. In the starlight, far out on the Preto, they could see a large wooded island, circled by swamp, which Gaston told them was the Ilha dos Macacos—the Island of Monkeys.

Somewhere on that island was buried the treasure of Potomayo. Somewhere in the trackless wilderness that encircled it, if he still lived, was Gussy's lost brother.

"And we're jolly well goin' to find old Conway, and go home with our twousahs pockets full of treasure!" declared Arthur Augustus.

And Tom Merry & Co. hoped that Gussy was right!

THE END.

Next Wednesday:

"GUSSY'S WILD MAN!"

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